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PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | Xbox 360 | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro



PREVIEW

No rumours, no speculation – read the facts about Link's greatest adventure



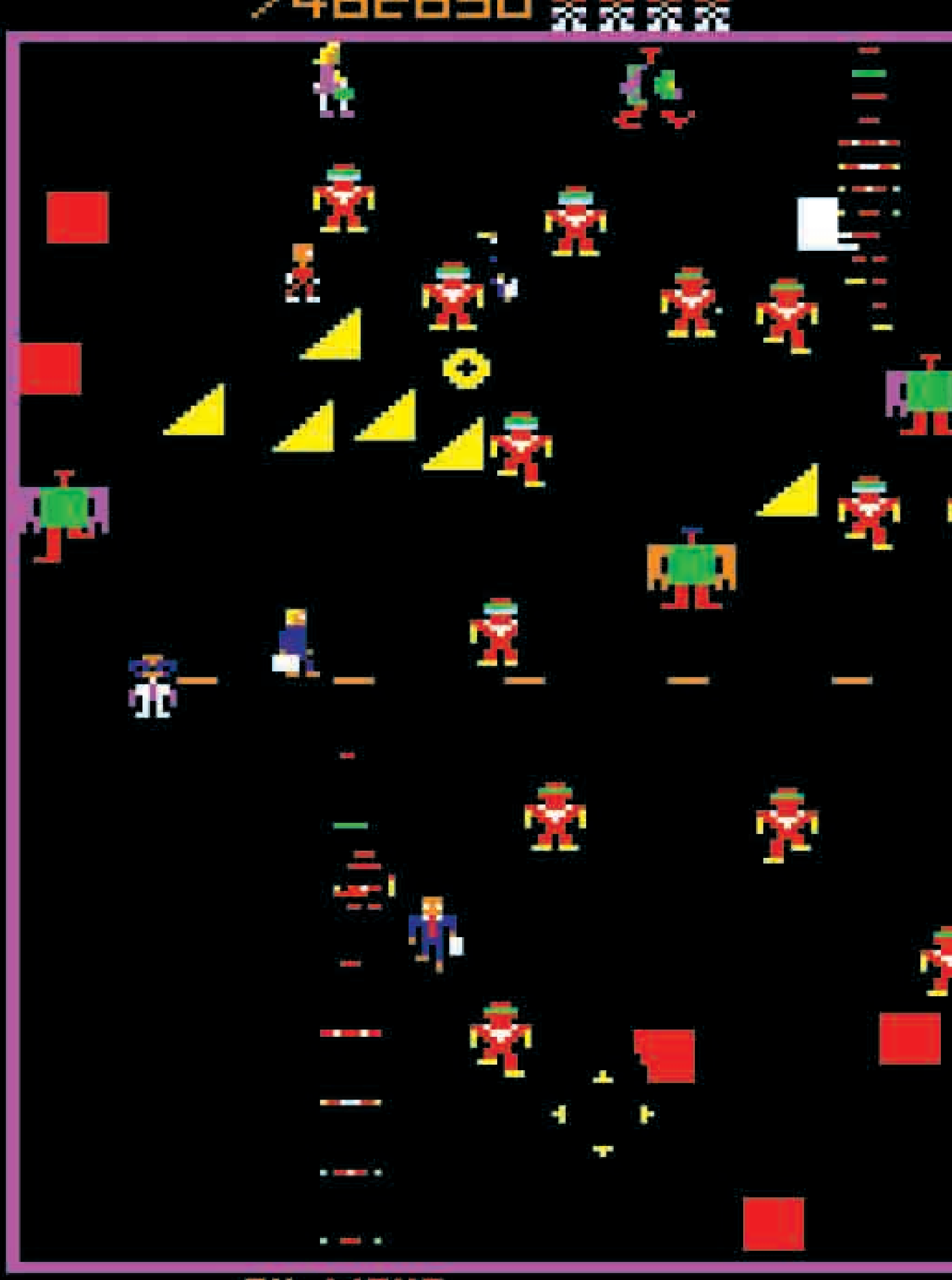

eMag

This month's stunning cover and *Zelda* preview are the product of trips to the US and Japan, firstly to play *Zelda: The Twilight Princess* and then to interview Eiji Aonuma, the game's producer. Some games magazines might base their coverage on a fleeting glance of a rolling demo or a handful of screenshots, but that's not what **games**™ is all about. Besides, it hardly seems fitting treatment for what will be the last – and possibly greatest – GameCube game.

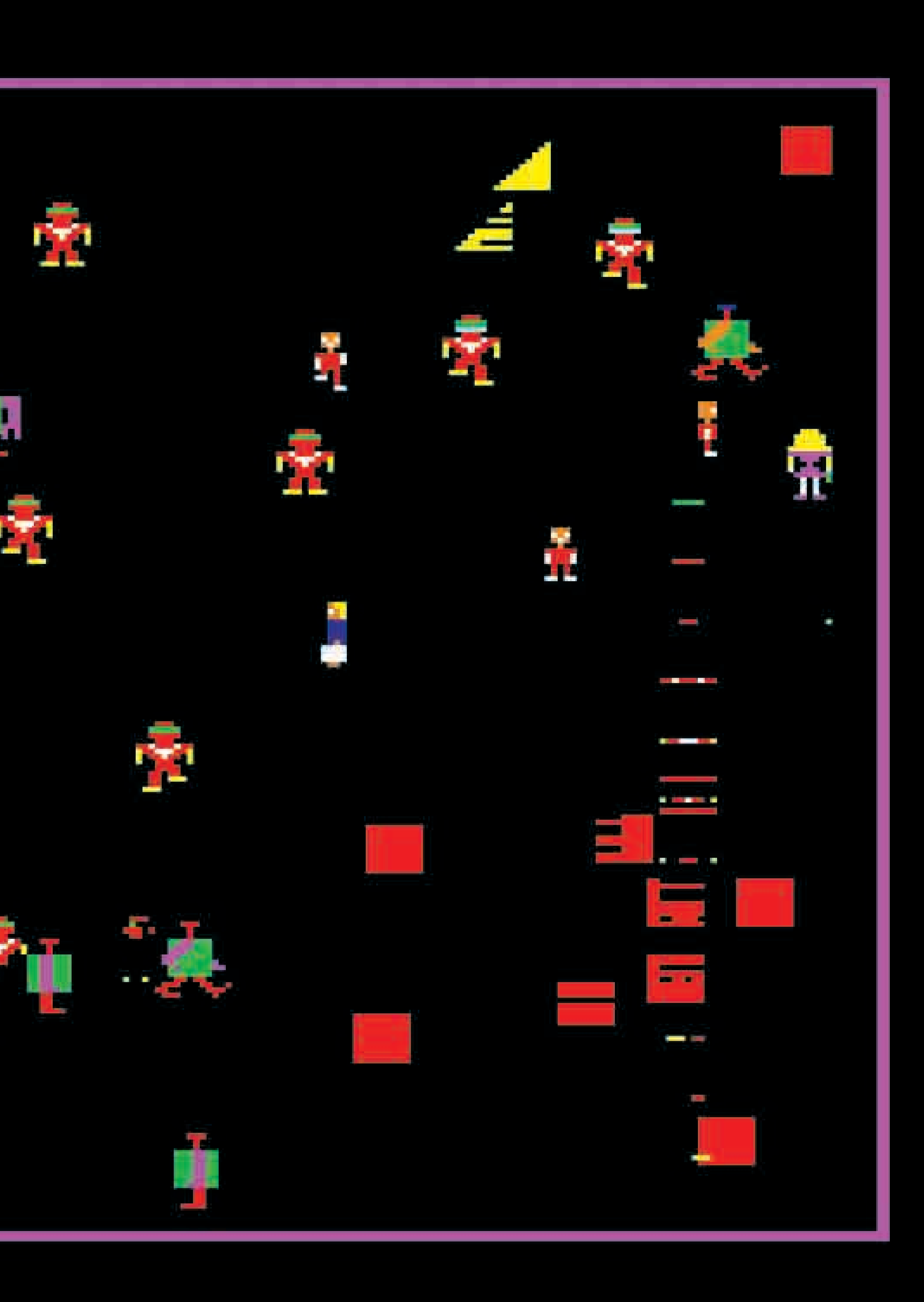
We think the preview speaks for itself and while, necessarily, Nintendo wants to hold back some of the many secrets of one of the most anticipated games of the year, there's plenty of new information you won't read anywhere else. At a time when we're all eagerly awaiting the release of the next generation of hardware and games, it's reassuring to find that the current hardware can still excite.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor





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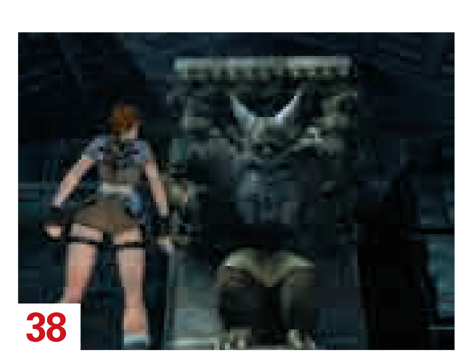
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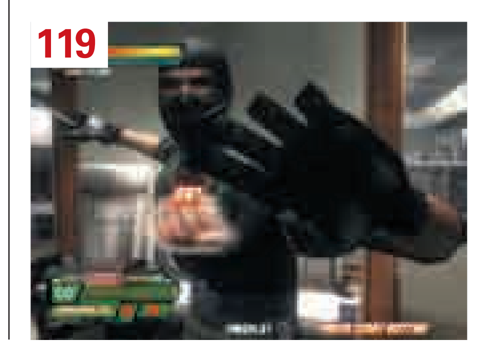
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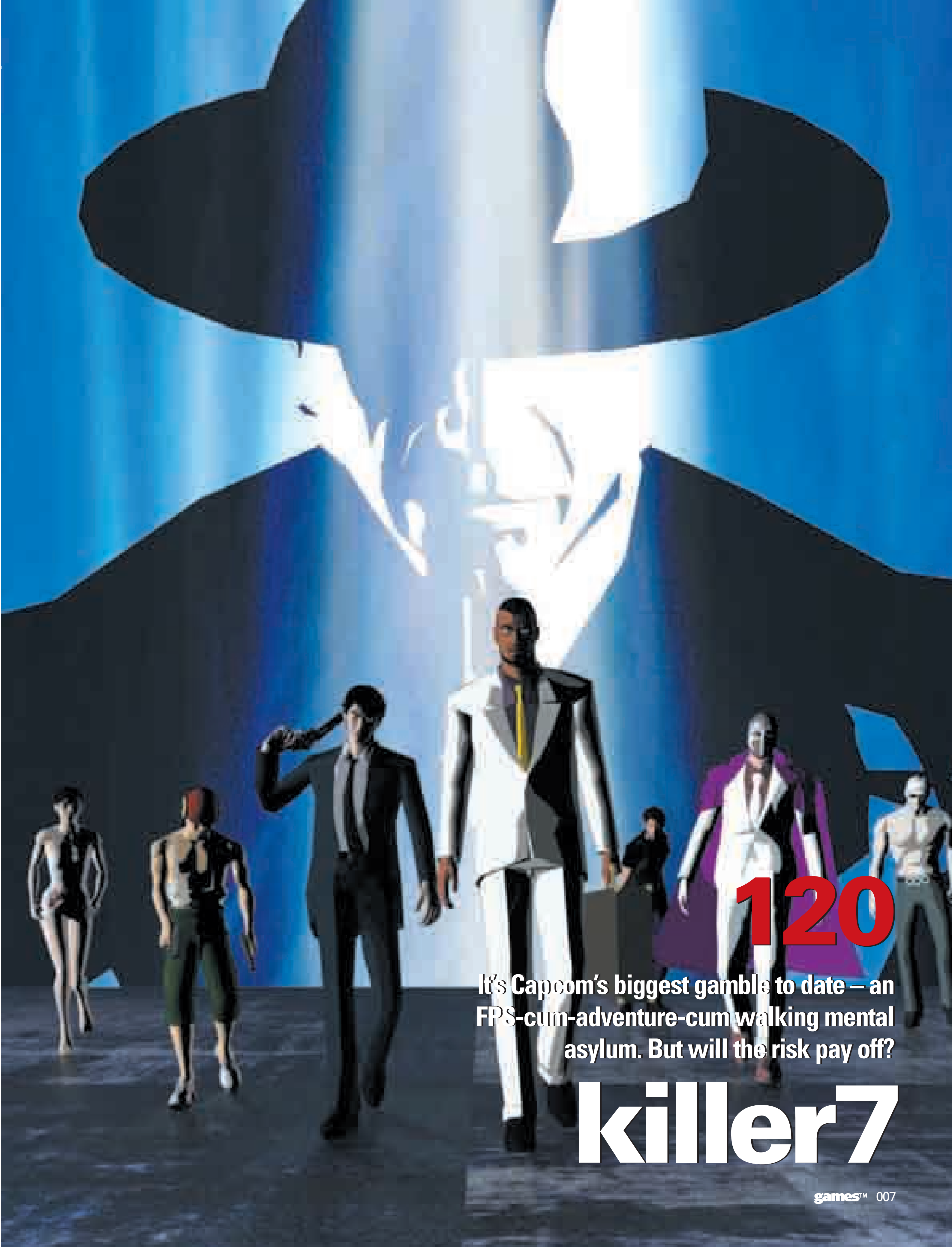
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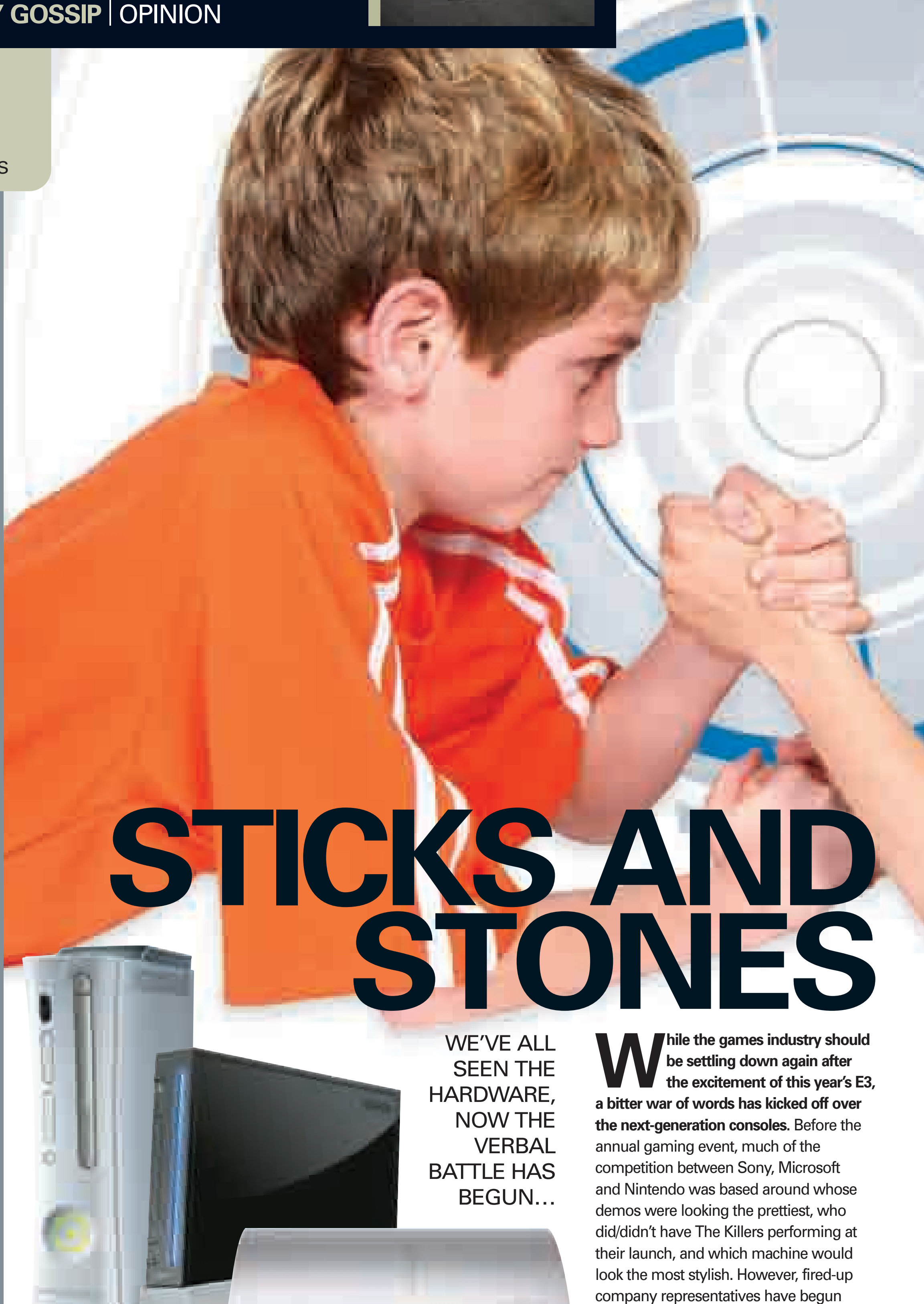

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It's Capcom's biggest gamble to date – an FPS-cum-adventure-cum walking mental asylum. But will the risk pay off?
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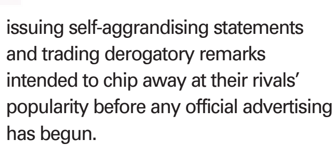
FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS



STICKS AND STONES

WE'VE ALL SEEN THE HARDWARE, NOW THE VERBAL BATTLE HAS BEGUN…

While the games industry should be settling down again after the excitement of this year's E3, a bitter war of words has kicked off over the next-generation consoles. Before the annual gaming event, much of the competition between Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo was based around whose demos were looking the prettiest, who did/didn't have The Killers performing at their launch, and which machine would look the most stylish. However, fired-up company representatives have begun



"WE WILL BECOME THE **MARKET LEADER** WITH OUR **NEXT-GENERATION CONSOLE**"

ROBBIE BACH, CHIEF XBOX OFFICER, MICROSOFT

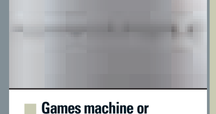
issuing self-aggrandising statements and trading derogatory remarks intended to chip away at their rivals' popularity before any official advertising has begun.

Almost everyone involved with a next-gen launch has been at it, but Sony's Ken Kutaragi has provided the most spectacular display so far. He's belittled Microsoft, claiming that it is no threat to Sony and the fact that sales of the Xbox have recently topped those of the PS2 in the US is "much like accidentally winning a point from a Shihan [a karate master]".

This was an impressive low blow, but Microsoft isn't a company to take an attack like this lying down; chief Xbox officer Robbie Bach has responded simply by stating that neither Sony nor Nintendo's E3 presentations held any surprises at all for him. He also declared: "We will become the market leader with our next-generation console." Well, it is a jungle out there – or possibly a playground.

TOUGH TALK

COMPANY REPRESENTATIVES DISH OUT THE ABUSE



Games machine or 'supercomputer'? We'll see about that…

SONY

Sony Computer Entertainment boss Ken Kutaragi, not content with already labelling the PlayStation3 a "supercomputer" rather than a games console, has decided to criticise both Microsoft and Nintendo by defining their new consoles as nothing more than toys. Attempting to push its console ahead of the pack in this manner is certainly not a new tactic for Sony, which played a very similar card when the PlayStation2 launched back in 2000 and it tried to position the console as a personal computer rather than a regular games system (and it was nothing of the sort). This time, however, the claims are looking far more likely to be true with photo- and video-editing software being possible functions thanks to the machine's Linux operating system.



Microsoft seems to be relying on 360's unified pipeline to see off its rivals.

MICROSOFT

Much of the talk from Microsoft's corner has come from ATI developer relations manager Richard Huddy, who has also dismissed the idea that the PlayStation3's slightly higher clock speed (550MHz against Xbox 360's 500MHz) will give it any advantage when it comes to sales. Huddy says that the 360's ATI unified pipeline will put it ahead of Sony's machine, in which ATI's rival, Nvidia (the company providing the PS3's graphics RSX processor), has opted against the unified pipeline route. The 'unified pipeline' means the 360 can handle more operations at once, making it highly efficient. "This time around, Nvidia doesn't have the architecture, and we do, so they have to knock it and say it isn't worthwhile," Huddy said in an interview with website bit-tech.net. "In the future, they'll market themselves out of this corner, claiming that they've cracked how to do it best, but RSX isn't unified and this is why I think PS3 will almost certainly be slower and less powerful."



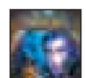
Will the Revolution's mysterious control method attract new gamers?

NINTENDO

In a predictable line of criticism, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata has frowned upon Sony and Microsoft for concentrating too much on CPU power and high-definition visuals rather than innovation and has claimed that this will "bloat up development costs". Once more, Iwata has claimed that Nintendo is aiming to attract non-gamers by creating new experiences and separating itself from the classic game mould, citing *Nintendogs* as an example of how the firm has already started down this path. "We're not about selling new kinds of TVs or taking control of the living room," Iwata stated in a Japanese newspaper after E3 when asked to talk about Nintendo's next-generation ambitions. However, the company will have to start releasing some firm details of the Revolution or it may get left behind.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WORLD WIDE WARCRAFT

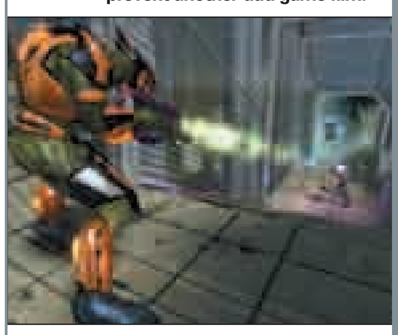
The hugely successful *World Of Warcraft* has reached another milestone, attracting 2 million online subscribers. The figure places *WoW* among the world's most popular online games, just behind NCsoft's *Lineage*. Blizzard is expecting a further boost to subscriptions following the game's launch in China; the beta version of the game already has a community of some 500,000 players, with over a million in the queuing system. The game should arrive in Taiwan – the world's second largest MMORPG market after South Korea – later this year.





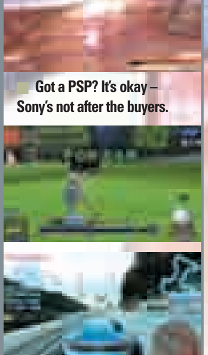
NO SCOPE FOR CHANGE

Universal and Fox studios are said to be nearing agreement with Microsoft on a deal to produce a *Halo* movie. Scripted by *28 Days Later* writer Alex Garland the screenplay comes with a long list of demands, including the stipulation that any changes the studio makes have to comply with a 'bible' compiled by Bungie itself. It seems Fox and Universal are willing to make concessions when it comes to creative control. Hopefully this should prevent another dud game film.



SONY CALLS IN THE LAWYERS OVER PSP IMPORTS

COURT IN THE ACT



Got a PSP? It's okay – Sony's not after the buyers.



Retailers have been contacted by Sony's lawyers.



British videogame import stores are readying themselves for a David and Goliath battle after Sony announced it would be taking legal action against anyone providing imported PSPs in the UK.

Following the issuing of 'cease and desist' orders to several retailers, Sony now plans to take various companies to court in an effort to crack down on the import market, also citing a loss of revenue and copyright infringement as reasons for the action. The PlayStation Portable isn't due to launch in the UK until 1 September.

However, the targets for the company's wrath have been small, online stores that have been selling the machines, rather than high-street giants such as HMV that have been selling PSP accessories, implicitly supporting the import trade.

One of the retailers Sony is taking to court is gaming website Electric BirdLand. The site's managing director, Dan Morelle, was unable to comment on the situation for legal reasons, but has previously said, "Sony refuses to admit that the UK gaming industry already has its fingerprints all over the PSP and importers are selling to Sony stores, Sony developers and Sony staff. The company's action against small independent retailers is just another indication of the bully tactics it chooses to deploy whenever it faces a challenge to its industry monopoly."

Morelle also believes that Sony is going against its own principles by going to court, which may create a lack of faith among its customers. "As a small family-run business, I cannot afford the expensive lawyers that Sony has access to at a click of its fingers so I will have to represent [myself]. It seems Sony has forgotten the admirable words of its founder Masaru Ibuka who once said, 'We shall eliminate any unfair profit seeking practices and constantly emphasise activities of real substance'."

Given the legal battle, there were rumours that Sony was ready to impound all imported PSPs in the UK. However, Sony has said this is not the case. "We can assure people who bought consoles on the black market that we are not going to be going after them," said Sony's head of corporate communications, Nick Sharples.

Sony has also been on the defensive over other matters, being quick to dismiss



“AS A SMALL, FAMILY-RUN BUSINESS **I CAN’T AFFORD THE EXPENSIVE LAWYERS** SONY HAS ACCESS TO **AT A CLICK OF ITS FINGERS**”

rumours of a reduction in the number of PSPs being manufactured. There had been talk that production had been slashed from 18 million units to just 12 million, but Sony has said those stories are “just speculation”.

And these aren’t the only numbers Sony has had to comment on this month after reports in the US suggested that the total sales of UMD movies hovered around the 100,000 mark. In fact, sales are nearer 500,000, with, according to a Sony representative, “at least two UMD movie titles having sold over 100,000 units in the USA”. These two ‘must-have’ UMDs are *House Of Flying Daggers* and the risible *Resident Evil Apocalypse*, though at least they show that the UMD format is proving more successful than was first predicted.

PLAYSTATION PORNABLE

A large number of pornographic UMD movie discs for the PSP are due to hit Japanese stores in the near future. Sony has hit out at the imminent release, calling it “utterly undesirable”, but can do nothing to stop it. Seven titles have already been announced from companies Glay’z and HMP and they’re set to appear this month. It seems unusual that Sony would not want ‘adult entertainment’ to be available to consenting adults who own PSPs, as the market for such titles is huge. Adult movies will undoubtedly begin appearing on UMDs in the US and Europe before long, and we suspect Sony may secretly appreciate the success of the format.





NOT ANOTHER…

GIZMONDO STORY

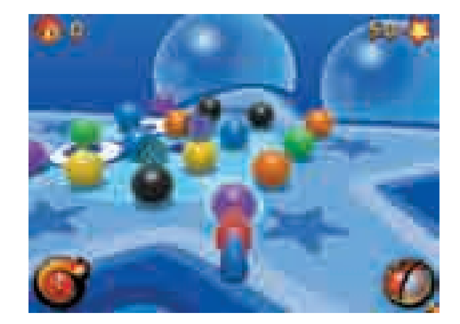
LAWSUITS ABOUND AS EVERYONE WANTS A PIECE OF TIGER TELEMATICS

You’re probably as fed up with reading about the Gizmondo as we are with writing about it but there’s yet more to report from the front of Tiger’s handheld offensive (two words which are more often used the other way around). Financial details revealed in the run-up to the Gizmondo’s US launch on 11 August have unearthed a number of dealings that had been kept quiet.

Three separate lawsuits have been brought to light. The first and most damaging is a $3 million case brought by Jordan Grand Prix Ltd based on the allegation that Tiger violated a Formula One advertising agreement back when the device was still called the Gametrac. The case is still in progress with the trial due some time this month.

The second lawsuit is also racing-related – US developer Handheld Games has filed a suit over a breach of development contract after Tiger allegedly failed to provide adequate tools and assistance for the firm. Handheld is seeking damages in excess of $75,000. Finally, a case filed by the Board of Regents claims that the Gizmondo’s predictive text software breaches one of its patents, a claim strongly refuted by Tiger.

Another revelation is that last year Tiger bought a 75 per cent stake in London-based modelling agency Isis Models Inc, exchanging some 40,000 shares and assuming liabilities of almost $250,000 in the process. And you wondered where it found all those hot chicks for its E3 booth…



Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

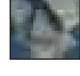


MORE CABLE DANGER

Xbox owners should check the manufacture date of their console, as Microsoft has revealed that even fairly new machines may suffer from a power cord fault. Earlier this year, Microsoft replaced over 14 million power cables after admitting that some could cause "smoke damage or minor damage to a carpet or entertainment centre". It's now been announced that all Xboxes made before 14 January 2005 may suffer from the same fault. Anyone with an Xbox made before this date should visit www.xbox.com or phone 0800 028 9276 for a free replacement.







VIRTUA STRIKERS

A strike threatened by actors who perform voice-over roles in games has been averted, as the two unions representing the actors pulled their demands. Instead, a new deal was struck whereby actors will receive a 36 per cent pay rise for their work over the next three and a half years. The contentious issue of residuals (effectively royalties from any game in which actors feature) was dropped, presumably in light of the improved pay structure. This is likely to be seen as a victory for the publishers, as they need not fear a large pay-out if their game is a hit.



■ An 18+ rating probably attracts more underage gamers than it deters.

■ *Manhunt* brought the subject of age ratings into the open again.

PARENTS TURN A BLIND EYE TO AGE RATINGS

WHAT'S MY AGE AGAIN?

A survey has found that many parents are happy for their underage children to play 18-rated games. Swiss research firm Modulum conducted the survey, proving what many within the games industry have known for some time.

"Parents perceive age ratings as a guide but not as a definite prohibition," said Jurgen Freund, Modulum chief executive. "Most parents think their children are mature enough and that these games will not influence them."

Rather than the age restrictions being of primary importance, the research has shown that parents are more concerned about the amount of time children spend playing games, rather than the content of the titles.

Even though18-rated games only make up a small percentage of game software released each year it's still a huge problem. Between January 2003 and July 2004, only 16 out of the 1,208 games on sale in the UK were given an 18+ certificate, but the mainstream media is quick to demonise these 'adult' titles.

The issue of age restrictions on games rose to prominence last year when the parents of a 14-year-old boy blamed the game *Manhunt* for their son's murder. The police subsequently dismissed the game's influence in the crime but it was still enough to shake

> "MOST PARENTS **THINK THEIR CHILDREN ARE MATURE** ENOUGH AND THAT **GAMES WON'T INFLUENCE THEM**"

up the games industry to the point where developers are becoming increasingly careful about the content of their games, and age certificates have become stricter than ever.

These efforts are useless, however, if Modulum's research is accurate. According to the report, most parents are well aware that games come with age certificates but simply don't take them seriously.

This study has not yet been finalised but it's not looking to be good news for the games industry. "It raises more questions than answers," commented Nintendo's UK boss, David Yarnton. "We need to look at solutions and as an industry we are quite united on this."

Of course, there's only so much the industry can do to help the situation. In the end the responsibility lies with the parents and their willingness to observe the rules that have been set. After all, if they aren't going to take these matters seriously then it's only a matter of time before we're faced with another *Manhunt* situation.

XBOX LIVE ARCADE DETAILS AND PRICING REVEALED

BACK TO THE OLD SKOOL

After quite the delay, Microsoft has unveiled the first details about its downloadable games service. A starter disc – which will be bundled with future Xbox consoles as well as being available from game stores and Microsoft itself – features 12 demos of simple card and board games. You don't even need to be online to play them, but there ends the good news. Full versions of these and other titles will cost £7.49, climbing to £11.50 for more 'advanced' ones. But bearing in mind that many 'proper' Xbox titles can be picked up for less than that, we can't see Xbox Live Arcade attracting serious attention.

But all this could change if the service starts to offer a greater spread of familiar titles for more reasonable prices. When the likes of *Midway Arcade Treasures* are available for under £20, you can't help but feel a bit cheated by Microsoft's pricing policy – paying through the nose for shareware-quality titles on a service that already commands a subscription is rather annoying.

And it's surely no coincidence that these details emerge so soon after Nintendo's announcement that the Revolution will have access to much of the NES, SNES and N64 back catalogue. Still, at least you'll be able to download *Solitaire* for less than the price of a pack of cards. Hang on…

Xbox Live Arcade Starter Discs are available from Microsoft on 0800 587 1102.



In keeping with the retro feel of the games, Xbox Live Arcade seems a retrograde step.

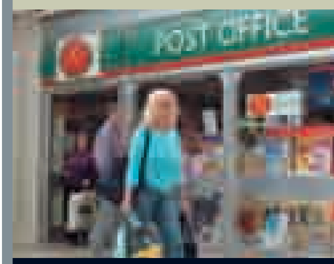


SUBJECTS OF PR LIES



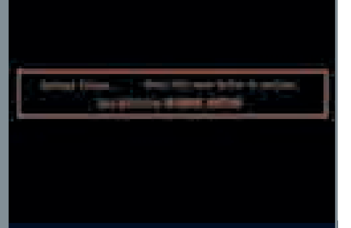
No.5 TELEPHONES

"I'll call you back in five minutes"



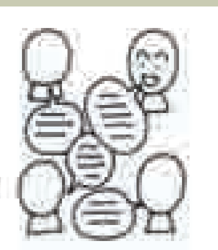
No.4 THE POSTAL SERVICE

"I sent off the CD yesterday"



No.3 REVIEW CODE

"Those bugs will be fixed… promise"



No.2 COMMUNICATION ERRORS

"[Colleague] said we could…"



No.1 PROMISES

"I'll see what I can do…"

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 34: A LICENCE FOR THE SAKE OF IT

Licensing is by no means a universal evil. We can understand it when developers take a film like *Spider-Man* and try to make a game out of it because *Spider-Man* could make an awesome game. Although we sometimes end up with horrors like *Superman* on the N64 and *Enter The Matrix*, at least the potential was there.

However, what really annoys us is when licences are bandied about for the sake of it; redundant, silly licences in which no nugget of inspiration could possibly hide. We're talking *Revolution X* featuring Aerosmith, we're talking *Cool Spot* (which pointlessly starred the 7-Up mascot), and we're talking the shameless McDonald's promotion *Mick & Mack As The Global Gladiators*. It's not big, it's not clever and, most important, it's really not necessary.

What brings this to mind? The news that excruciating 'cultural phenomenon' the Crazy Frog, fresh from its horrible ringtone and its number one single, is now available for games licensing. Yes, that means someone is almost certainly going to try to release a game that stars, or in some way involves, the Crazy Frog. Best get our portable gallows ready…



Silly Aerosmith – what were you all thinking?



We'd put a proper caption in here but the Frog isn't even slightly worth it.

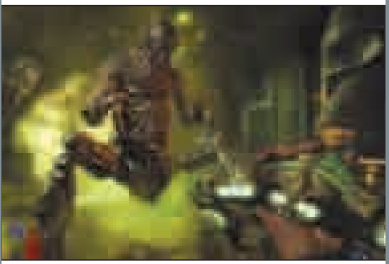
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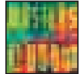
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



TAKE THAT

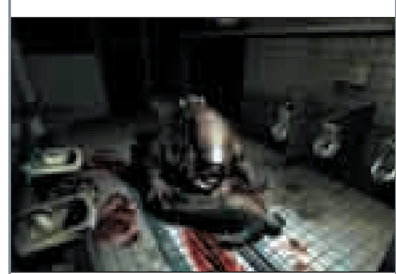
The parent company of 2K Games and Rockstar, Take 2, has come to an agreement with the Securities and Exchange Commission, putting a stop to a legal battle concerning 'channel stuffing'. Take 2 was accused of sending unwanted stock to stores and claiming it as sales. The publisher maintains it had no part in the alleged activity, but settled for a $7.5 million fine. Take 2 president Pail Eibler says the company is not affected. "We remain focused on delivering shareholder value through our leadership in the global interactive entertainment software market," he said.





DOOMSDAY

Book publisher Random House is being taken to court by ex-Ion Storm COO Michael Wilson over allegations that an id Software biography is libelous. *Masters Of Doom* details how John Carmack and John Romero created *Doom* and established id Software. A particular passage is said to allege that Wilson used id funds to buy a new car. Wilson denies the suggestions. "There's nothing they could have possibly said that could be more damaging," he said. "This is an industry publication read almost exclusively by my peers." It's not known if the upcoming film adaptation of the game will be affected.









NINTENDO STANDS FIRM WITH REVOLUTION

MIYAMOTO CONCERNED ABOUT VIDEOGAMING'S FUTURE

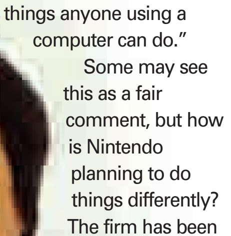
Nintendo guru Shigeru Miyamoto has hit out at the company's rivals, criticising their E3 showings. In an interview with CNN, Miyamoto said he was not impressed by Sony or Microsoft's demos. "Most of what you're seeing are not even the first projections of games – they're just shiny computer graphics," he said. "They're things anyone using a computer can do."

Some may see this as a fair comment, but how is Nintendo planning to do things differently? The firm has been subjected to considerable criticism since E3 over its relatively non-aggressive showing and continued reluctance to reveal concrete details about its new console, the Revolution. Next to Sony and Microsoft's showboating, the Revolution was pushed to the back of the minds of developers and attendees alike.

And yet Miyamoto would not be drawn on the specifics of Nintendo's new machine. "It's how we're going to use the technology that separates us," he explained, "and we're happy with the road we're taking. What we want to do is different… When you have a Revolution, you're not going to have the same experience as you would with the other home consoles."

The only thing that seemed fairly certain was that the Revolution will be focused on accessible gameplay rather than hardware capabilities, even though it will use cutting-edge technology. "We asked ourselves, 'why would a family need a games console?'," he said. "The answer is what's driving the development of the Revolution."

Miyamoto also expressed concerns over the length and nature of many current games. "There's not a lot I want to play right now," he said. "A lot of the games out there are just too long; if you're not interested in spending that time with them, you're not going to play." Indeed, he voiced the same opinions at the launch of the GameCube, with titles such as *Luigi's Mansion* and *Pikmin* offering around ten-hour completion cycles as opposed to the days or weeks needed to complete titles like *Grand Theft Auto*. Miyamoto stated that he wished to return to simpler, pick-up-and play gameplay, such as that which characterises the DS.



"THE REVOLUTION WILL USE CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY, BUT IT'S ULTIMATELY ABOUT HOW THAT TECHNOLOGY IS USED"
SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



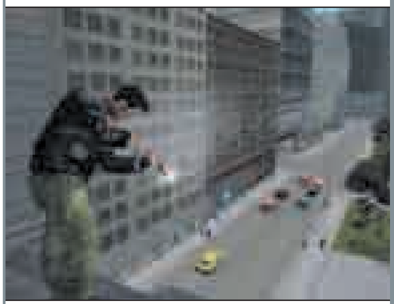
PITCH SLACK

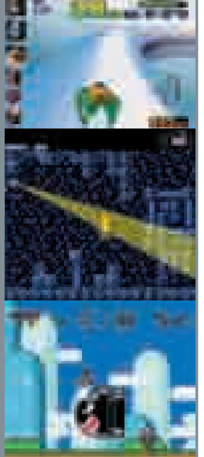
Vin Diesel has signed up to play Agent 47 in the forthcoming *Hitman* movie. Obviously, Diesel was first choice for the role, being that he is devoid of talent and bears little more than a passing resemblance to the game's anti-hero. Aside from these 'minor' problems, we try to remain hopeful. According to Adrian Askarieh, the movie's producer, they are "delighted" to have Diesel on board. "Vin Diesel and Agent 47 are a match made in heaven," he said. There's no word yet on the script or the rest of the cast for the adaptation of Io Interactive's best-selling series.



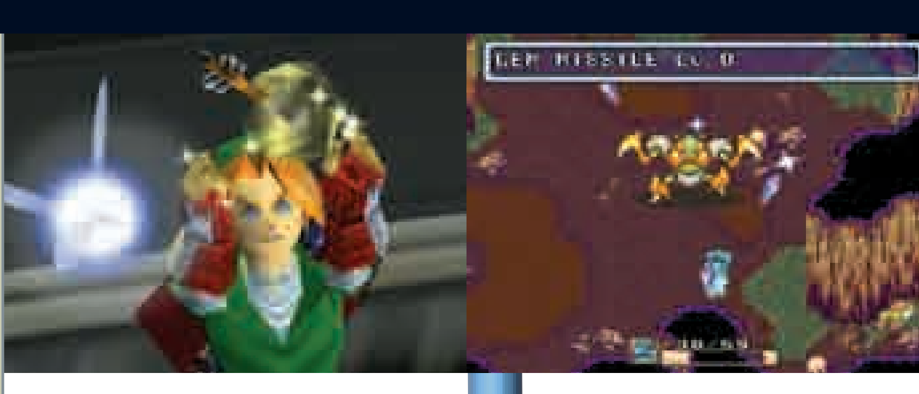
STORIES FROM THE CITY

Rockstar has confirmed that PSP title *GTA: Liberty City Stories* will arrive in October, shortly after Sony's handheld's European launch. Returning to *GTA III*'s Liberty City, players control Tony Cipriani, a character in *GTA III*. Cipriani will be voiced by series veteran Michael Madsen, which will lend the main character the gravitas now expected of Rockstar's free-roaming universe. How the game will drain PSP battery life remains to be seen…





Looks like we'll have to pay for the pleasure of experiencing our old games again



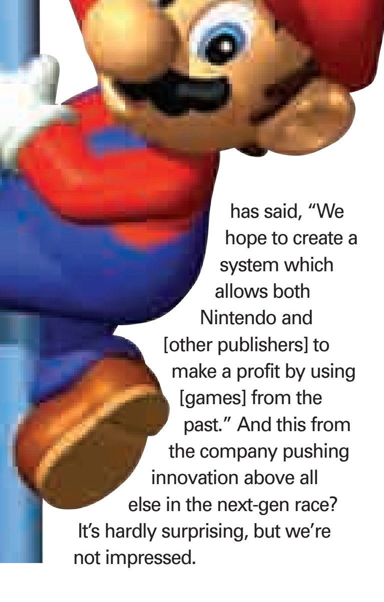
FEES ANNOUNCED FOR NINTENDO'S BACK CATALOGUE

CASH FOR CLASSICS

Yes, we heard those rumours that downloads of games from Nintendo's back catalogue via a Revolution service wouldn't cost anything. But now Nintendo president Satoru Iwata has confirmed that the service will not be free, meaning gamers will have to pay for all those games they played on the SNES years ago (and on the GBA not so long ago).

It's not yet clear whether the payment will be in the form of a subscription or a pay-per-play service, but Iwata has confirmed that older games will occasionally be available for free download as a promotion for a new one, or come bundled with a newer title, much like the *Master Quest* version of *Ocarina Of Time* came with *Wind Waker* upon its GameCube release.

Nintendo, of course, already makes a large profit from its older titles via products such as the NES Classics range, and the DS launched with a remake of *Mario 64*. Iwata has said, "We hope to create a system which allows both Nintendo and [other publishers] to make a profit by using [games] from the past." And this from the company pushing innovation above all else in the next-gen race? It's hardly surprising, but we're not impressed.



TRAUMA TROUBLE

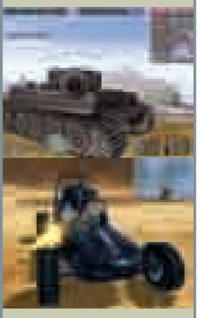
DICE SHUTS DOWN DESERT COMBAT CREATOR

Fans of *Battlefield 1942* will be well acquainted with Trauma Studios, which developed the much-loved free *Desert Combat* mod for the game. Sadly, following Digital Illusions CE's acquisition of the company in September last year, along with the rights to *Desert Combat*, the studio has now been shut down.

The 12 members of staff at Trauma have all been offered positions at DICE's studio in Stockholm following their studio's closure. DICE paid $300,000 for Trauma Studios and has since caught the eye of Electronic Arts; in fact, EA now owns most of DICE's stock.

According to DICE's board chairman, Thomas Skoglund, "the conditions have changed and the future plans of the company differ considerably from when Trauma Studios was acquired. The acquisition of Trauma Studios was nevertheless particularly motivated; the deal contained value in the form of rights to trademarks as well as a new game concept."

Sadly, it looks as if a commercial follow-up to *Desert Combat* will now never see the light of day. With the staff now stationed in Stockholm, however, Trauma's influence should still have an affect upon future *Battlefield* games.

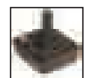


The *Desert Combat* mod for *Battlefield 1942* was hugely popular.



Data Stream

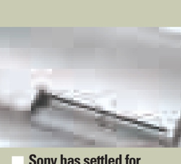
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



OUT OF CONTROL

Shigeru Miyamoto, the friendly face of Nintendo, has admitted that the controller for his company's next-generation Revolution is still incomplete. "We're at a stage where we're adding and removing various kinds of functions, which has been very fun," he recently said. Nintendo wants to build on its success with the DS by making the Revolution's controller fit into its 'all-access gaming' motto, which it hopes will encourage non gamers to use its systems. Nintendo president Satoru Iwata expects that gamers will be "surprised with the Revolution's controller". The internet is rife with speculation over how the controller will take shape, with rumours of gyroscopic control and a touch screen currently circulating.





Sony has settled for Blu-Ray for the PS3.



Toshiba's HD-DVD has to play catch-up.

OUT OF THE BLU-RAY

DVD UNION UNLIKELY AFTER TALKS BREAK DOWN

Hopes of averting the VHS/Betamax-style war that's brewing between the next generation of DVD formats were dashed last month after talks between the two format developers, Sony and Toshiba, broke down over storage issues.

"There's very little chance that the negotiations will go through," said Sony Computer Entertainment chief Ken Kutaragi, speaking at a press conference shortly after talks collapsed, before insisting that Sony's choice of using Blu-Ray disc technology over HD-DVD was because "product planning" forced the firm to make an early decision.

According to inside reports, the biggest bone of contention concerns offsetting current costs against future-proofing – although HD-DVD discs can only store 30Gb of information against Blu-Ray's 50Gb, HD-DVDs can be made with current technology and will therefore cost less. However, those behind Blu-Ray claim that the increased storage capacity is the key issue here and more space will be essential when high-definition entertainment becomes the norm.

As it stands, Toshiba's HD-DVD camp has significant backing from various technology manufacturers (NEC, Sanyo) and movie studios (Universal, Paramount, Warner Bros.). However, Sony's Blu-Ray format appears to have stronger support; not only are giants such as MGM and Disney on board and the disc is set to be used for the PS3, but EA and Vivendi became the first games publishers to pick sides when they joined the Blu-Ray Disc Association in January.

MARRIED TO THE MOB

EX-CAPCOM GENIUS MOVES INTO MOBILES

The world of mobile phone gaming is set to get a significant boost in quality (in Japan, at least) thanks to the news that Yoshiki Okamoto, ex-COO and senior managing director at Capcom, is planning to launch a range of mobile phone titles in the coming months.

Through a new Japanese mobile game service called Mobgame, Okamoto – who is best known for his work on classic titles such as *Street Fighter II*, *Final Fight* and *1942* during his time at Capcom – will be overseeing production on a range of games released through the service.

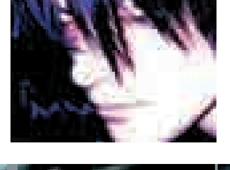
The Mobgame service will initially emerge with eight titles created by parent company Mobcast, covering a variety of genres from simple arcade titles to more expansive RPGs and adventure games. It's expected that a Western publisher will pick up the games for European and US release at some point after launch.

Interestingly, Mobgame is using Okamoto's profile to push some of the games. Some titles will carry his name, including one of the launch games – a mobile party game allowing up to 99 people to play at once entitled *Okamoto Yoshiki no Ousama-Game* (*Yoshiki Okamoto's King Game*).

Okamoto's development company, Game Republic, is currently working on a number of PlayStation2 and Xbox 360 titles including *Genji*, an impressive-looking samurai adventure due out later this year.




eMag



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD

Don't all rush at once, ladies. Plenty to go round…



"'IF THIS IS HOW DEVELOPERS PARTY,' I THOUGHT, COLLAPSING POCKETS OVERFLOWING WITH CONDOMS, 'I

At 3pm Thursday, a few months ago, my boss says: "Want to go to Chicago tomorrow night?" in that excited tone he would get when he knew he was doing me a favour. "Chicago? Why? Uh…sure." I didn't know what I was agreeing to, I'd just never been there before. Drop everything and fly across the country for Lord knows what reason? Why the hell not? Reasons are for suckers and people who are afraid to die.

But I got a reason anyway. Turns out Higher Voltage, maker of *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*, was having a party. It was to be quite the shindig. Strippers, booze, Playboy Bunnies, booze, bands, booze, and the coup de grace – Ron Jeremy. Yes, *that* Ron Jeremy, star of over 1,700 porn films, hung like a horse, face like a mule. Guys love him because he's not handsome, but he seems to be able to get whatever woman he wants. Women love him because he's non-threatening yet terribly fulfilling, or so I've heard. That clinched it. Nothing would keep me from this party.

I pack light – a book for the flight, a GBA, a jacket, and some hopes and dreams, just in case. Left at 2:30pm, arrived at 8:30. A black sedan picked me up from the airport, and didn't know where to go. After a rousing argument on his mobile phone with his significant other regarding whose responsibility it should be to remind him to take out the trash, and a lengthy viewing of a map, we were on our way through the Chicago sprawl.

The party was being held on the ground floor of an office building that had been emptied of all signs of productivity. Loud music played – Playboy Bunnies milled about, towering over everyone, or at least me, in their high heels, togas and tiaras. Light was dim, coming largely from the gigantic stage that had been erected in the room. Stripper poles shot up from the floor, leopard-print girls gyrated in cages. First order of business was food; I'd slept on the plane, it was now 9pm and I required sustenance if I was to take this all in. The pizza had pepperoni in it, which I discovered after eating a slice. If you're not a vegetarian yourself, or don't know one, I'll clue you in to what eating red meat does to us: it makes us vomit. Cute, right?

I figured I'd kill it with booze, so headed to the makeshift bar, being sure to grab a handful of condoms from the food table as I left. These things were everywhere in the place – on the tables, on the floor, on the bar, in the Bunnies' bags… I ordered a 'something with alcohol in it' and got it post-haste. I turned around and got a face-full of Ron Jeremy. "Hi!" I said, totally non-nervously. "I have no idea what I'm doing here!"

"That's you and me both, kid," he responded, in his trademark nasal tone.

He sauntered over to the far wall of the room, where I discovered playable demos of the game. A representative from Higher Voltage was showing Ron the ropes – he seemed to be having a remarkably good time. I guess hitting on girls is his thing, so that's a vote of confidence. Then again, I assumed they also paid him to come. Just then, the voice of Larry himself took

EXHAUSTED ONTO THE HOTEL BED, MAY JUST HAVE TO BECOME ONE.'"

the stage, announcing the first band – local Chicago rockers Bang! Bang! Their brand of retro indie rock was bested only by the guitarist's robust sideburns and the female bass player's see-through shirt. The place exploded with rocking-out developers and pole-dancing Bunnies.

Bang! Bang! were followed up by the all-girl band The Dials – the keyboard player of this excellent retro band wore a shirt which said 'tiny tits' – a shirt across which Ron Jeremy had scrawled "I disagree!". After the bands played we all talked in the back with Mr. Jeremy, who had just met with then-US-presidential hopeful John Kerry. They allegedly met in a basement, surrounded by security guards, when Kerry told Jeremy, "I can't allow you to officially endorse me, but I appreciate the support." He didn't take the man's support and now look where we are in this country: just shy of a president and just a bit overstocked on dictator antics.

Bang! Bang! drove me back to the hotel after some dancing and unsuccessful flirting with the local girls – it appeared everyone there but the Bunnies had come with a boyfriend. I retired to my room alone, but so did Ron Jeremy. And if the man himself goes to bed alone, you can't really feel too bad for yourself. Exhausted, pockets overflowing with condoms, I collapsed on the bed. If this was how developers partied, I thought, I might just have to become one.

Many thanks



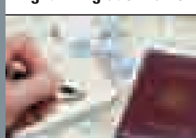
LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Free Speech



HATE ABOUT BRITAIN…

Tight Immigration Laws



The Shape is on holiday. He will return in issue 35.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

THE DAILY SHOW

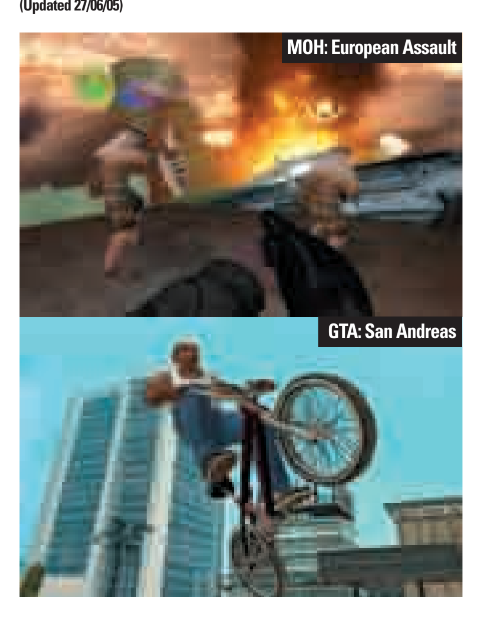


Political satire isn't illegal in the US, despite Bush Jr trying to make it so (probably because he doesn't 'get it'). Thankfully then, *The Daily Show* and, more specifically, Jon Stewart exist – on as regularly as David Letterman but actually funny. Apparently, they broadcast it in Holland on CNN… and some Dutch people think it's a real news show. Oh dear.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	EA Games	PS2
2	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	PS2
3	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	EA Games	Xbox
4	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Xbox
5	Batman Begins	EA Games	PS2
6	Star Wars Episode III: ROTS	LucasArts	PS2
7	Batman Begins	EA Games	Xbox
8	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	Xbox
9	Madagascar	Activision	PS2
10	Star Wars Episode III: ROTS	LucasArts	Xbox

(Updated 27/06/05)



MOH: European Assault

GTA: San Andreas



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"I ASK FALCOON, LEAD ARTIST FOR SNK, WHICH LOOKS BETTER – 'XBOX 360,' HE SAYS. 'PLAYSTATION3 LOOKS

A bearded man and a dwarf – a match made in fighting game heaven.

So I met Falcoon, lead artist for SNK, when I was at E3. He's a good guy. We established a good rapport and walked around the show floor together a little bit. I got the opportunity to meet him thanks to my colleague and sworn-brother Brandon Sheffield (you know him by now), who'd had an interview with him that morning. Brandon, lifelong fan of *King Of Fighters*, is the type to dress in black clothes covered in metal studs and pants with belts that connect the legs. He might be trying to be Iori Yagami. Falcoon and I were talking about Brandon's Iori complex a little bit, tempting me to at one point ask, "Hey, who do you think is cooler-looking, me or Brandon?" Falcoon answered without hesitation: "You". I was wearing a button-down shirt, a cowboy jacket, a pair of Japanese Edwin jeans, a studded black belt and new black glasses. My hair was, for the record, looking better than it had in two years. I asked him to elaborate, because any fashion-conscious man loves elaboration, especially when he's just been told he's good looking. "The jacket is very unique. That and the glasses – they frame your face well." I asked Falcoon who he'd rather make into a *King Of Fighters* character in the future, me or Brandon. "You, totally," he said. "I've never designed a character with glasses before."

So my head was swollen to the size of a watermelon with pride. Falcoon – a man with a body that an old Chinese historical romance would exaggerate as 'eight feet tall' – sat there judging me further. "I see a lot of kids on the street in Japan lately, and I only like individual elements of their fashion," he said. "Belts or shirts or pants. When I was just out of high school it seemed like the fashion in Japan was more… together. Kids had a better idea of the big picture. Now they just throw stuff together. They're mixing and matching just for mixing and matching's sake. It's careless."

Falcoon is a die-hard gamer, and his favourite game at the moment is *Tekken 5*. Why *Tekken 5*? A flashy 3D fighter hardly seems like the type of game a man so deeply involved with *King Of Fighters* should like. "It just feels right," Falcoon replies. This is not a light statement – the man is a tournament-level player, and scarcely a day goes by where he doesn't take his membership card to the local arcade near SNK Headquarters in Osaka.

I'm beginning to sense a dark disturbance. I think of *KOF: Maximum Impact*, the critically panned attempt at a three-dimensional *King Of Fighters* SNK released last year. The project had been Falcoon's baby, and he's even producing the sequel. I ask a quick question: "Which looks better to you, the



PLAYSTATION3 OR XBOX 360. LIKE AN ASAHI BEER CAN.'"

PlayStation3 or the Xbox 360?" Falcoon gives a quick answer: "Xbox 360. PlayStation3 looks like an Asahi Beer can. And that logo font screams *Spider-Man: The Movie*." I wasn't asking about the systems' appearances, yet the answer is a revealing one. I roll with it: "How about Xbox over PlayStation2? Which is more visually appealing?" "I've learned to love the Xbox," Falcoon says. "The size, the weight of the thing; it makes me think it's packed with quality." What about the GameCube? I ask. Falcoon scoffs. "I don't even own a GameCube any more. It has no guts."

I can't help feeling this is all a sign of something. Either it's just that *King Of Fighters* is no longer the 'most Japanese' fighting game franchise (that would have to be *Guilty Gear*, for now), or that the whole Japanese game design aesthetic is in critical trouble. Either way, I recently got a new jacket, and it's blue. Next time I meet Falcoon, I'll tell him it's my player-two outfit.

Kind regards



BEST IN SHOW

It was an auspicious E3. My runner-up for Game Of The Show (behind the winner, Sega's *Spartan: Total Warrior*) is *Parfait Station*, though shown in video only. It's by Korean development house Game Infinity and it's an MMORPG that uses two-dimensional overhead shooting as its battle engine.

Part of the trailer video shows the producer talking candidly, and subtitled: "All other MMORPGs have tedious forms of combat; we thought we'd replace those with a familiar kind of player-rewarding action, such as… 2D shooting."

Years ago, I do believe I said of my friend's *EverQuest* addiction, "I'd totally play that game if the battle system was like *Smash TV*, or even *Pocky And Rocky*." I really did say that. And now the Koreans have done it! They've put old-school Japanese shooter gameplay into a Western genre. The future is afoot! Is an MMORPG that plays like a Game Boy *Castlevania* next? Should I just move to Seoul already? Stay tuned…

TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON THIRTY FOUR	INSULTING SOMEONE'S FASHION
Oioi! Osharedane, ne, imoyarou?	H-Hey! You a snappy dresser, huh, potato-boy*?
Omee, doko de hirotta, sono inakakusai boushi?	Where the hell did you find that shit-kicker hat?
Kabuttemorauyo. Ja, dou? Kakkoii? Motemotesou? Chigeeyo!	Let me try that on. So, how do I look? Cool? Make me popular with the ladies? I don't think so!!
Sou, jikan da. Resutoran ni chanto youyaku shitandaga, saki ni omae wa kigaero. Oidasaretakunaishi.	Hey, it's time to go. I made reservations at the restaurant and everything. You change clothes first, though. I don't want to get kicked out or anything.
Shaatsu nara ore no fuku kiteiizo. Kedo zettaini ore no torankusu hakunayo. Omee saikin doko ni neteru ka to wakannaishi. Imo no hatake toka.	You can borrow a shirt of mine if you want. Just don't you dare wear my boxers. I don't know where you've been. Potato fields and such.

*don't ask

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Metal Saga: Sajin no Kusari	Success	PS2
2	Kenka Bancho	Spike	PS2
3	Soccer Life 2	Banpresto	PS2
4	DS Training For Adults	Nintendo	DS
5	Magister Negi Magi	Marvelous	GBA
6	Berwick Saga	Enterbrain	PS2
7	Namco X Capcom	Namco	PS2
8	killer7	Capcom	PS2
9	Nintendogs: Shiba & Friends	Nintendo	DS
10	Shojo Yoshitsune Den 2	WellMade	PS2

(Week ending 12/06/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)


Kenka Bancho


DS Training



SHOULDA, WOULDA, COULDA



Like most industry types, I'm very excited at the direction gaming may be taking on the new hardware shown at E3. I'm sure developers are looking forward to having more power to play with; there must be a lot of people thinking, "Finally! We're going to have the power to bring that great idea to life!"

It may be early days but there seems to be a trend emerging already. Looking at some of the showreels presented by Microsoft and Sony, it appears that games featuring the player amongst a cast of thousands of zombies/Roman warriors/armies/single-celled organisms could be the next generation's answer to cel-shading or, heaven forbid, lens-flare.

It's reminiscent of the rush to create a 3D polygon engine for the GBA when it was first launched. Years later there have been a few 3D polygonal GBA games but none spring to mind as being particularly enjoyable. To steal a line from a moderately successful dinosaur movie: "In their rush to prove they could, they didn't stop to think whether they should".

Just because you can now accurately render every nut on the wheels of the cars in your next-gen racer doesn't convince me that you're adding something new to the genre. On the other hand, show me a simple-looking game that can only truly be enjoyed with the intuitiveness offered by stylus control and I'll be captivated by a new gaming experience.

What I'm saying is that current-generation ideas presented with next-generation polish aren't good enough. Neither is passing off some technical wizardry as a full game. What I want to see are next-gen ideas taking gaming experiences into uncharted territory.

Until then, though… *Tetris* anyone?

Mr X is a cog in the industry machine. He wishes to remain anonymous.

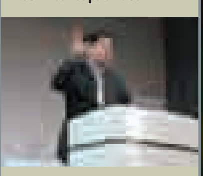
FROM THE FRONT

SONY TALKS TECH AS HARDWARE DETAILS EMERGE, WHILE NINTENDO TURNS ITS BACK ON HDTV…

SONY BOSS PUFFS OUT HIS NEXT-GEN CHEST



Ken Kutaragi has been bigging up the PlayStation3's technical capabilities.



THAT'S SUPER WITH A CAPITAL 'S'

Ken Kutaragi, the president of Sony Computer Entertainment, has once again been talking up his new baby, the PlayStation3. The continued one-upmanship between Sony and Microsoft reached new heights when Kutaragi labelled the next-generation Playstation an "entertainment supercomputer" and not just a games console. With plans to install a Linux operating system onto the machine's hard drive, Kutaragi is treading on Microsoft's toes.

Speaking in an interview with Japanese gaming website Impress PC Watch, Kutaragi went into detail about the PS3's impressive specs, and waxed lyrical about Cell technology. "Prior to PS3, real-time rendered 3D graphics might have looked real, but they weren't actually calculated in a fully 3D environment," he said. It is easy to get lost in the mire of stats and figures that both Sony and Microsoft are constantly touting, but at least we can be sure both machines are extremely powerful.

Another point of interest was the information Kutaragi let slip about PS3's hard drive. "We're not going to equip [the PS3 with] a HDD by default, because no matter how much [capacity] we put in it, it won't be enough," he said. Is this testament to the unbelievable power of PS3 – that nothing can house its might? Or is it simply a cheeky Sony demanding a further payout from customers who want hard drive capabilities (which come as standard with the 360)? Only time will tell, as with every aspect of the hype leading up to the launch of the next-generation consoles. Teraflops and Cell structures are all very well, but we'll reserve judgement until the games appear.

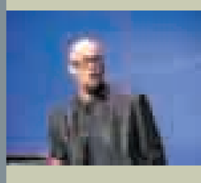
In other PlayStation news, Sony confirmed this month that its 'cumulative production shipment' of PlayStation2s has exceeded 90 million units globally. The original PlayStation sold 100 million units, and Sony is keen to do the same with PS2, further strengthening the brand.



The revolution will not be televised (in HD, anyway).



Microsoft's J Allard is all about high definition.



HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

NINTENDO IGNORES HIGH DEFINITION

Microsoft's J Allard has talked constantly about the HD era. SCE president Ken Kutaragi has said the Playstation3 will support playback on two HDTVs simultaneously. So it's come as a shock that Nintendo is apparently shunning HD support with its next-gen Revolution.

Nintendo of America's vice president of corporate affairs, Perrin Kaplan, has gone on record saying "there currently are no plans for Nintendo Revolution to support high-definition video output".

This is a kick in the teeth for Nintendo's loyal fans, especially considering the GameCube supports games with a progressive scan mode. Kaplan's comments are quite vague, however, so whether she means the Revolution will not support HD full stop, or that the machine will not demand it as a development standard, is unsure.

Revolution details will continue to come in at a trickle over the coming months, so Kaplan's comment that, "We have thoroughly considered the best means of video output for the system and are dedicated to delivering the best hardware possible to meet the demands of our consumers" will become clearer in time.

"TERAFLOPS AND CELL STRUCTURES ARE ALL VERY WELL, BUT WE'LL RESERVE JUDGEMENT UNTIL THE GAMES APPEAR"

TOTAL PLAYSTATION SALES (MILLIONS)

PSone
PS2
PS3?
100
80
60
40
20
100

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

INVESTMENT BANK PREDICTS XBOX 360 PRICE

Analysts at major investment bank UBS have predicted that Microsoft's Xbox 360 will retail for $299 when it hits shelves later this year. Interestingly, it also predicts that the machine's development cost will be $375, meaning that Microsoft will be selling it at a loss, just like the Xbox.

The $299 price would translate to roughly £160, but as we know too well, console pricing is not usually judged on exchange rates. Hopefully, we will be getting 360s for under £200, which, when compared to the original Xbox's price of £299, is not at all bad for a slice of next-generation loveliness.

The $75 subsidy Microsoft will incur on each 360 sold is quite high, even for a company used to selling machines at a loss. However, by establishing a large user base, Microsoft can hope to make all the money back (and then some) in software sales.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Xbox
2	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	EA Games	Multi
3	Juiced	THQ	Multi
4	Star Wars Episode III: ROTS	Activision	Multi
5	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	Multi
6	Batman Begins	EA Games	Multi
7	Area 51	Midway	Multi
8	Championship Manager 5	Eidos	Multi
9	FIFA Street	EA Sports BIG	Multi
10	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	PS2

A decent game at the top of the chart? Miracles do happen after all… although the less said about the bottom six, the better. Still, *Gran Turismo 4* is propping everyone up – that's a plus, at least.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 18 June 2005)

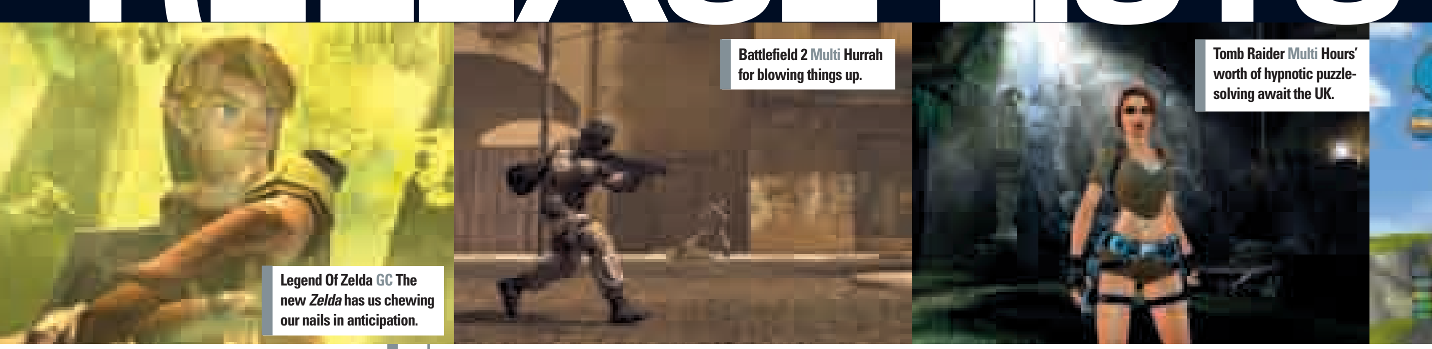


GTA: San Andreas

MOH: European Assault

Juiced

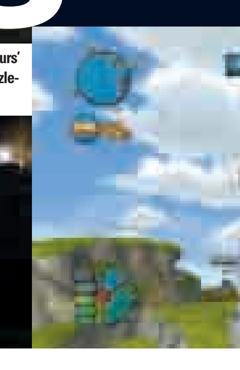
RELEASE LISTS



Legend Of Zelda GC The new *Zelda* has us chewing our nails in anticipation.

Battlefield 2 Multi Hurrah for blowing things up.

Tomb Raider Multi Hours' worth of hypnotic puzzle-solving await the UK.





GUILD WARS

Format: PC
Publisher: NC Soft

Finally, an MMORPG for people who can't afford the monthly subscriptions. *Guild Wars'* accessibility and absorbing storyline have drawn us in, and we've been happily wandering around Tyria with random German people searching for new armour. Bring on the first expansion pack, is all we can say.



AMPLITUDE

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony

Yes, we're still playing *Amplitude*, because it's still utterly awesome. Four-player battles have become even more heated as our beat-busting skills have improved over time and the hardest difficulty setting has been explored. It's just a shame there are no Tom Jones tracks…



PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Format: PSP
Publisher: Sony

Sony's had a hissy fit about UK gamers importing PSPs but that doesn't mean we've been having any less fun with *Ridge Racer* and the hypnotic *Lumines*. If you're looking to pick one up before the European launch, www.dvdboxoffce.com is one of the few places we found with stock – and at £160, it's a bargain too.





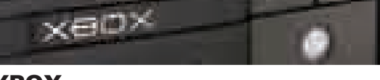
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '05			
15 July	Fantastic Four	Activision	
15 July	killer7	Capcom	Wanted
21 July	Brian Lara International Cricket	Codemasters	
22 July	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	2K Games	
29 July	Worms 4: Mayhem	Codemasters	
July	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
AUGUST '05			
5 August	Pilot Down: Behind Enemy Lines	Oxygen	
26 August	187 Ride Or Die	Ubisoft	
26 August	Total Overdose	SCi	
August	Anubis: Curse Of The Pharaoh	Midas	
August	DICE	Bandai	
August	Golden Age Of Racing	Midas	
August	International Super Karts	Midas	
August	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi	
August	Top Spin	2K Sports	
SEPTEMBER '05			
2 September	Aquanox – The Angel's Tears	JoWooD	
9 September	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	
September	Brave: The Search For Spirit Dancer	Sony	
September	Colosseum: Road To Freedom	Koei	Wanted
September	Crime Life: Gang Wars	Konami	
September	Evil Dead Regeneration	THQ	
September	EyeToy: Kinetic	Sony	
September	Genji	Sony	
September	Heroes Of The Pacific	Codemasters	
September	SpyToy	Sony	
September	Resident Evil Outbreak Gile 2	Capcom	
September	Samurai Showdown V	Ignition	
September	SOCOM 3: US Navy SEALs	Sony	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Dead To Rights II	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5	Koei	
TBC	FarCry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	The Warriors	Rockstar	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Phantom Kingdom	Koei	Wanted
TBC	Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	Wanted
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	Wanted
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	Rogue Trooper	SCi	
TBC	Scarface: The World is Yours	Vivendi	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	True Crime 2	Activision	
TBC	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted



GAMECUBE

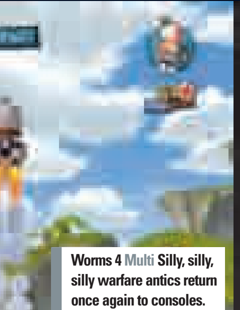
Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '05			
15 July	Fantastic Four	Activision	
22 July	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	2K Games	
AUGUST '05			
August	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi	
August	Madden NFL 06	Electronic Arts	
August	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
SEPTEMBER '05			
September	Mario Baseball	Nintendo	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Namco	
TBC	187 Ride Or Die	Ubisoft	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	WWE Day Of Reckoning 2	THQ	
TBC	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Dancing Stage: Mario Mix	Nintendo	
Q4 '05			
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
TBC	Fire Emblem: Path Of Radiance	Nintendo	Wanted



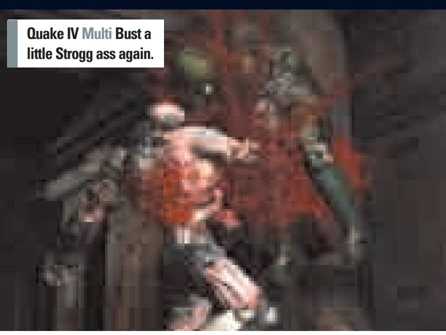
XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
JULY '05		
15 July	Fantastic Four	Activision
21 July	Brian Lara International Cricket	Codemasters
22 July	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	2K Games
29 July	Worms 4: Mayhem	Codemasters
AUGUST 05		
5 August	Pilot Down: Behind Enemy Lines	Oxygen
26 August	187 Ride Or Die	Ubisoft
26 August	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike	Ubisoft
29 August	Total Overdose	SCi
August	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft
August	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi
August	Dead To Rights II	Electronic Arts
August	Madden NFL 06	Electronic Arts
August	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



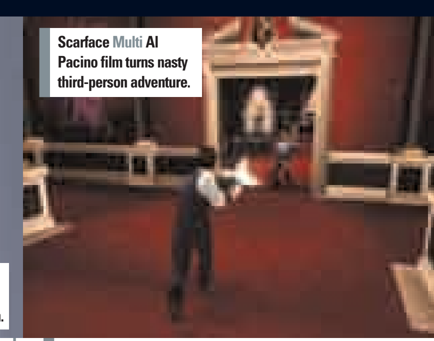
Worms 4 Multi Silly, silly, silly warfare antics return once again to consoles.



Quake IV Multi Bust a little Strogg ass again.



killer7 PS2 Weird, hard-as-nails, super-styled action.



Scarface Multi Al Pacino film turns nasty third-person adventure.

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER '05			
2 September	MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology 3	THQ	
9 September	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	Wanted
September	Crime Life: Gang Wars	Konami	
September	Evil Dead Regeneration	THQ	
September	Heroes Of The Pacific	Codemasters	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	
TBC	Timeshift	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	Rogue Trooper	SCi	
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	Vivendi	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	
TBC	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted
TBC	True Crime 2	Activision	

PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '05			
15 July	Fantastic Four	Activision	
21 July	Brian Lara International Cricket	Codemasters	
22 July	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	2K Games	
22 July	Codename: Panzers Phase 2	CDV	
29 July	Worms 4: Mayhem	Codemasters	
AUGUST '05			
5 August	Pilot Down: Behind Enemy Lines	Oxygen	
19 August	Neuro Hunter	Deep Silver	
26 August	Earth 2160	Deep Silver	
August	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	Wanted
SEPTEMBER '05			
2 September	Blitzkrieg 2	CDV	
2 September	MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology 3	THQ	
9 September	ER	Mindscape	
30 September	X3: Reunion	Deep Silver	
September	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	Wanted
September	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
September	Crime Life: Gang Wars	Konami	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Timeshift	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Age Of Pirates	1C Company	
TBC	Neverend	Dusk2Dawn	
TBC	Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Spartan: Total Warrior	Sega	
TBC	Rise And Fall: Civilizations At War	Midway	Wanted

Month	Title	Publisher	
TBC	Starship Troopers	Empire	
TBC	Preyground	Frozenbyte	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	Vivendi	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '05			
15 July	Fantastic Four	Actvision	
22 July	Charlie And The Chocolate Factory	2K Games	
AUGUST '05			
29 August	Dynasty Warriors Advance	Nintendo	
August	Namco Museum	Namco	
August	One Piece!	Bandai Games	
SEPTEMBER '05			
TBC	Tokyo Xtreme Racer Advance	Crave	
TBC	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	Super Robot Monkey Team Hyperforce Go!	Buena Vista	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	Wanted

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Lumines	Sony	Wanted
TBC	WipEout Pure	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Ridge Racer	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Gran Turismo 4 Mobile	Sony	
TBC	Death Jr.	Konami	
TBC	Infected	TBC	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe VFX Battle	Capcom	
TBC	Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	World Rally Championship	Sony	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	
TBC	MediEvil: Resurrection	Sony	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	

NINTENDO DS

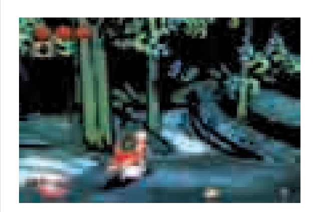
Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '05			
July	Nanostray	Majesco	
AUGUST '05			
August	Lost In Blue	Konami	
August	Blades Of Thunder 2	Summitsoft	
SEPTEMBER '05			
30 September	Advance Wars: Dual Strike	Nintendo	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh!: Nightmare Troubadour	Konami	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Scratch!	Capcom	
TBC	Lunar Genesis	Ubisoft	
TBC	Vandal Hearts	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Zoo Tycoon	THQ	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

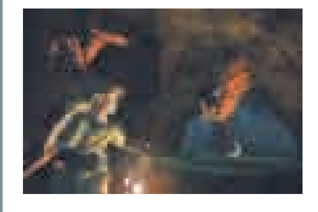
OKAMI

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
This really wowed us at E3, and it was only 30 per cent complete. We can't wait to see more of this beautiful mythological adventure – such enchanting games don't come along too often. Clover Studio's artistic prowess coupled with a ground-breaking gameplay system will almost certainly be a winning combination.



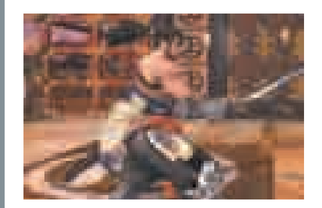
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

Format: Gamecube
Publisher: Nintendo
Whether you're a *Zelda* fan or not, this game's E3 showing should have piqued your interest. Since *Ocarina Of Time* we've wanted a darker *Zelda* game than *Wind Waker* – and here it is. We need to know more. We need to know now.



SOUL CALIBUR III

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony
We still have regular multiplayer rounds of *Soul Calibur II*, so seeing the newly PS2-exclusive *Soul Calibur III* at E3 made us happy, happy little people. The fact that it looks almost exactly like its predecessor is slightly disturbing, but we loved *Soul Calibur II* so much in the first place that it's not yet diminishing our anticipation.





Someone get the RSPCA on the phone… **Ranma 1/2: Hard Battle – SNES [NCS] 1992**


Genma



IT ISN'T CALLED A **LEGEND** FOR NOTHING…

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

We used to think there were two types of developer: those that would gladly tell you everything about their game (even to the point of a publisher stepping in to shut them up) and those who clearly haven't mastered the power of speech. There is, however, a third kind: Eiji Aonuma.

Sitting across the table in a fairly spacious room in Nintendo's Kyoto headquarters, the strain on the face of the man responsible for the biggest GameCube title of the year, *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, is starting to show. He wants to tell us about his latest creation. He's dying to show us how great it's going to be. He's bursting at the seams with a desire to grab us by the lapels, pull us close and gabble about the wondrous surprises of *Twilight Princess* until Shigeru Miyamoto himself comes down from the hallowed seventh floor and drags him off by the scruff of his neck.

But he can't. It's Nintendo policy to remain tight-lipped, the very reason why all the *Zelda* games (and, indeed, many of the company's other first-party titles) have such a magic and mystery about them; you don't know what you're going to experience until you actually do. That isn't to say that *Twilight Princess* is an entirely unknown entity, however. Time spent poring over every second of the extensive demonstration behind closed doors (or rather, behind burly security guards wearing Nintendo shirts) on the upper floors of Nintendo's E3 stand, not to mention probing the right people for information, revealed more than enough about the game to make us slaver over the prospect of the finished version. And slavering isn't something we're known for.

"This time, we're trying to create a very cool-looking Link," says Aonuma. "I've always been told that I can't let Link engage in anything that makes him look foolish – he always needs to look very cool." And, it would seem, incredibly real. Much as it pains us to admit this given our love for *The Wind Waker*'s cel-shaded beauty, but the decision to move the *Zelda* franchise down a more realistic path (no doubt made, to some degree at least, under pressure from those who hated *Wind Waker*'s art direction) has certainly paid off. *Twilight Princess*' Hyrule is a place of intricate detail and beauty, of illuminating light and dark shadow that ▷

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ What will most likely be the last big game on the GameCube will also be its greatest – the *Zelda* game that the fans wanted to see.

HISTORY

■ Link's evolution has undoubtedly been impacted by fan reaction to *The Wind Waker*, with his latest adventure looking more like the early GameCube Spaceworld demo rather than anything we've played before.



Horseback combat is important, but there's more to it than what we've seen so far…

feels far more real than any other example of it; not necessarily more alive, but certainly more genuine.

Of course, going on to estimate how large the world of *Twilight Princess* will be against previous games is somewhat redundant. Miyamoto once said that the problem of making a 'lifelike' Link lies in having everything in proportion to the lead character: steps taken by a realistically sized Link would be of a certain length and therefore require the overall world to be of a relative size, something impossible to do on hardware like the N64. The same argument can be applied to *Twilight Princess* although the GameCube is more than capable of such proportions, which makes the current suggestion of the game being triple the size of *Ocarina Of Time* necessary rather than fanciful.

"Three times the size of *The Ocarina Of Time* could well be a good estimate," admits Aonuma, "but only because the impression of realism is going to be far greater than in *Ocarina Of Time*. Occasionally in *Ocarina Of Time* people were deceived by unrealistic expression; this time, we really want to present a level of realism so huge that people feel that they are inside of the world. When we show objects far away, you need to believe you really are far away. In this sense, the world really has to be larger than *The Ocarina Of Time*."

But this doesn't mean that *Twilight Princess* will cut corners on content – after the sting of *The Wind Waker* having two of its dungeons removed to facilitate the game's completion on schedule, Aonuma is determined not to make the same mistake twice. The complexity of the dungeons, for instance, is looking to remain true to the *Zelda* legacy, as illustrated by the E3 demo. The obligatory Forest Dungeon, resplendent in its overgrown and leafy glory, is a convoluted maze of tunnels and chambers requiring the use of several familiar *Zelda* concepts (and a couple of new ones too, such as recruiting monkeys to act as rope swings).

"TWILIGHT PRINCESS IS BY TURNS HUGELY FAMILIAR AND REFRESHINGLY SURPRISING, NOT TO MENTION BEING UNDENIABLY BEAUTIFUL IN EVERY WAY"

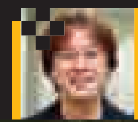
The bosses, too, will also be suitably jaw-dropping, not to mention challenging, and will require a bit of thought outside just hitting key areas; using the Gale Boomerang to snatch explosive Bomb Flowers out of the hands of a swinging ape and propel them into the mouth of a man-eating fly-trap over five times your size isn't immediately obvious, let alone easy to do.

The other way that *Twilight Princess* manages to expand its horizons is in a similar way to *Zelda* fan favourite *Link To The Past* by offering an alternative universe that is both recognisable (existing, as it does, in the same geographical form as the 'regular' world) and yet the polar opposite. Not surprisingly, an evil force is perpetuating the spread of this realm across Hyrule – a Moblin commander summons a Twilight gateway in the demo, although it goes without saying that he reports to a higher power… but no, we didn't say Ganondorf – and according to Aonuma, "one of Link's key missions is to save Hyrule from this Twilight World".

But it's the small problem of Link's lycanthropic tendencies upon entering said world that throws up the biggest twist seen so far; from sword-swinging hero to four-legged friend, his transformation is something none of us saw coming before Nintendo's grand unveiling at its E3 conference. What's more important is how central this change is to the overall adventure – one Nintendo representative informed us that Link's exposure to the Twilight World makes up 40 per cent of the entire game ("We haven't decided, but that may well be the correct percentage

POCKET FULL OF MIRACLES

While *Twilight Princess* offers a wide range of items and useful gadgets like any *Zelda* game, even those that feel familiar to long-time fans have their own tricks up their sleeves. The Boomerang, for instance, has an improved lock-on function that requires careful aiming by the player, and it now has the ability to create mini-tornadoes – hence its re-branding as the Gale Boomerang. A small tweak to Link's inventory system also helps to keep players guessing as to how far into the adventure they are – instead of boxes that highlight how many items you're missing, *Twilight Princess* uses a *Secret Of Mana*-style series of rings that can be expanded or retracted depending on how many items you're carrying. A small change, but an important one, we feel.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Eiji Aonuma doesn't live in Shigeru Miyamoto's shadow when it comes to *Zelda* – he's carved his own mark on the franchise since taking over as series director in 1996. An accomplished game director and producer, Aonuma has come a long way since starting work as a designer at Nintendo over 16 years ago.

HISTORY

- **TLOZ: THE WIND WAKER** 2002 [Cube]
- **TLOZ: MAJORA'S MASK** 2000 [N64]
- **TLOZ: OCARINA OF TIME** 1998 [N64]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE LEGEND

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA + TWILIGHT ZONE + LYCANTHROPY = TLOZ: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

■ The visuals are suitably impressive, but there's plenty of familiarity lurking underneath.

■ New takes on old favourites help to keep long-time fans of the series guessing.



CHARACTER PROFILE

■ Link might be seen as an equal to Mario in terms of his importance to Nintendo, but he's far less open to misuse. While the moustachioed plumber has appeared in several unimpressive titles, everyone's favourite Hyrulian has yet to disappoint under Nintendo's guidance. Even *The Adventures Of Link* wasn't as bad as many claim…

HISTORY

- **TLOZ: LINK'S AWAKENING DX** 1998 [GBC]
- **TLOZ: A LINK TO THE PAST** 1991 [SNES]
- **THE LEGEND OF ZELDA** 1986 [NES]

■ The way Link's face reacts to movement around him really is rather remarkable.

"WITH TWILIGHT PRINCESS, WE REALLY WANT TO PRESENT A LEVEL OF REALISM SO HUGE THAT PEOPLE FEEL THAT THEY ARE INSIDE THE WORLD"
EIJI AONUMA, PRODUCER, NINTENDO

■ This new take on Hyrule is far darker and more mysterious than in previous games.



■ Midna's powers are being kept secret, but that crown's certainly got a sting in it…

we need," agrees Aonuma), leaving us wondering what kind of reaction fans will have to such a fundamental shift in gameplay style. Nevertheless, Aonuma feels the change is meant to enhance players' sense of empathy and association with the 'human' Link character, rather than prove detrimental.

"One of the big objectives with *Twilight Princess* is to let the player engage in quite a different control style than any of the other games in the series," he insists. "This time, the main character is adult Link and adult Link is supposed to be able to do anything. In *Ocarina Of Time* this was shown by young Link being far less capable; in *Twilight Princess* Link turns out to be the beast, which is actually quite helpless. The combat and play style this time will highlight this in the same way; it will show exactly how capable Link in his adult form is."

And he is capable, perhaps more so than he's ever been. This Link is a man of the people, caring about his home village of Taoru as much as he does about saving the world; a Link highly skilled in horseback combat (an element that, despite the free-roaming and jousting sections shown already, Aonuma insists will be far more than what anyone expects); a Link with all the skills we've come to expect and more we can't even imagine. But as we said, that's the eternal joy of the *Zelda* titles: no matter how familiar you are with the franchise, there's always something to surprise and delight.

The time we've spent with *Twilight Princess* has already etched a minor blight on the hours of enjoyment that lie in wait for us in November; as journalists, Aonuma has allowed us to twitch the corner of the game's veil, but as *Zelda* fans we'd prefer not to know anything until he pulls it back completely. The irony of it all is that Nintendo's last triple-A GameCube title will also be the ultimate reason to own the console – the coming of twilight in more ways than one.

THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF

… or rather, turned into one. From *Twilight Princess*' announcement at E3 2004 through to this year's dramatic revelation, the truth is now clear – that rather menacing wolf seen in all the trailers *is* Link. As was seen way back in the Dark World of *Link To The Past* on the SNES (where Link changed into an animal representation of his heart and mind), the transformation here occurs only when he enters the Twilight World that is slowly spreading across the land. Initially imprisoned by Twilight Guardians, it's only after a mysterious character named Midna intervenes that you're free to explore the realm. Exactly who Midna is or what kind of power her mysterious crown contains hasn't been revealed yet, although the similarities to *Majora's Mask* (also by Eiji Aonuma) are notable – just like Link and Tatl the fairy, the relationship between Link and Midna (at first through necessity, gradually growing into friendship) plays an important part of the story.

"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOLD THAT I CAN'T LET LINK ENGAGE IN ANYTHING THAT MAKES HIM LOOK FOOLISH – HE ALWAYS NEEDS TO LOOK VERY COOL"
EIJI AONUMA, PRODUCER, NINTENDO

DOCTOR DOLITTLE

By placing Link's roots into a more rural context than previous games, it makes sense that his ties with nature are far more important to the gameplay too. Specifically, it's his dealings with the animal community that help him progress – some, like being able to glide across gaps by holding a chicken aloft, are familiar, while others, such as his enhanced riding skills, demonstrate improvements over what has gone before. Even more are completely new; while exploring Taoru early on, Link can use a sprig of special grass to summon a graceful hawk to his side, before sending her soaring off to retrieve distant items from within a beehive. With two types of this grass – horse and hawk – both being revealed already, it's likely that Link's ability to 'talk' to the animals (particularly while in his wolf form) will go further still in the finished game.



"IF WE CAN COME UP WITH IDEAS THAT WILL CONVINCE PEOPLE TO BUY A NEW ZELDA GAME WITH A CEL-SHADED LINK THEN WE'LL BE WILLING TO PRODUCE SOME MORE"



THE MAN BEHIND THE BOY

EIJI AONUMA IS THE MAN WHO'S BEEN GUIDING LINK'S HAND FOR THE LAST NINE YEARS. WE VISITED JAPAN TO ASK HIM WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE AT THE HELM OF ONE OF NINTENDO'S MOST CHERISHED FRANCHISES…

gamesTM: Since you started with the *Zelda* series, what's been your high point?
Eiji Aonuma: I think that *Ocarina Of Time* was the most impressive title for me – my favourite bit was probably the Water Shrine, although I'm pretty sure that most people would say that it's the most difficult section of the game. The fact is, I love diving in the sea and I thought I should put plenty of diving puzzles in it. This made it a bit more difficult than most of the game, but it's the bit that remains most strongly in my mind.

gTM: A bit more difficult? We know many people who gave up around there.
EA: [Laughing] Yes… I guess I now see that I maybe should have made it a little easier.

gTM: *Ocarina*'s end sequence and final battle are among our favourites – how did you come up with them?
EA: That was the hardest part for us. You'd been through so many difficulties to get to that section of the game and people expect something significant. We decided that Ganon should morph into some sort of beast-type enemy. We really wanted to build up the player's emotion right to the end. The difficulty of the boss wasn't the focus – it was the emotion. We gradually built it up until you really felt that you were finally going to beat Ganon. I think the music was one of the most important elements. It was the feeling that was captured – finally *Ocarina Of Time* was over.

gTM: How did you decide on the right music?
EA: Most of the tunes in *Ocarina Of Time* were composed by Mr Koji Kondo and I rarely disagree with the music he comes up with, but as far as this final battle tune was concerned this was the first time I asked him to change anything. I asked him to include an element of sadness.

gTM: Did Koji Kondo do the music for *Majora's Mask*? The music in that added to the darkness of the game. Was there any reason for it being so much darker than *Ocarina Of Time*?
EA: Actually, we didn't set out to create a dark image in *Majora's Mask*, but we'd come up with this specific scene of the moon falling onto the Earth and you had to solve everything in under three days – you had to rush things. It was frightening and the sad music also added to the darkness.

gTM: Between all the games you've worked on, there have been many fine ideas – how do you keep coming up with them?
EA: New ideas want to come out so often, so what I do is always try to explore some unprecedented, new, appropriate theme and then we have to determine what's going to be the core element that forms the foundation of the game. Once we think what this theme is going to be, we can brush up on the details. In case of *The Twilight Princess* everyone is coming at me with new ideas all of the time. There's never an instant solution no matter how many ideas you get given – everything needs to be reviewed and built upon.

gTM: Do you ever think about working on other projects?
EA: For so many years I've been working on *Zelda*, so of course sometimes I feel like doing something else. Unfortunately, when it comes to coming up with ideas for other games I just can't come up with anything attractive enough. Also, although *Zelda* games are primarily adventure and riddle-solving games, there are many other genres inside them – even sports games. So when I do come up with an idea, I often find that it's been done in one of my previous games.

gTM: The visual change in Twilight Princess is something that many people are excited about. Is this disappointing, compared to how *Wind Waker* was received?
EA: I'm not really upset at all, that's just how people are going to make the variation. *The Wind Waker* was successful; in a sense, it invoked the people's interest – many people were aware of this unusual *Zelda* title and wanted to play it. I could understand that it's the visuals that separate the people who do like it and the people who don't, but at least we understood that the visual style of *The Twilight Princess* is the most understandable for most of the game players and will be widely accepted – this was obvious from the latest E3 show. How people have reacted will definitely shape how our future titles turn out.

gTM: We really liked cel-shaded Link. Is there any chance of him making a comeback?
EA: Of course, I like Link in that shape – I have no intention of stopping producing cel-shaded Link. If we can come up with some ideas that will convince people to buy a new *Zelda* game with a cel-shaded Link, then we'll be willing to produce some more.

LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BACK TO BASICS

ANGEL OF DARKNESS - MELONS x GAMEPLAY = LEGEND

"THE LARA CROFT CHARACTER IS RESILIENT AND UNSTOPPABLE… IN LEGEND, WE REVEAL THE LARA CROFT GAMERS HAVE BEEN WAITING TO SEE"

TOBY GARD, SENIOR DESIGNER, CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

■ Okay, so she's not entirely realistic but it's good to see Lara looking vaguely normal.

■ So retro: it's the classic 'hidden' handstand technique from the original game.

LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

PC/MULTIFORMAT

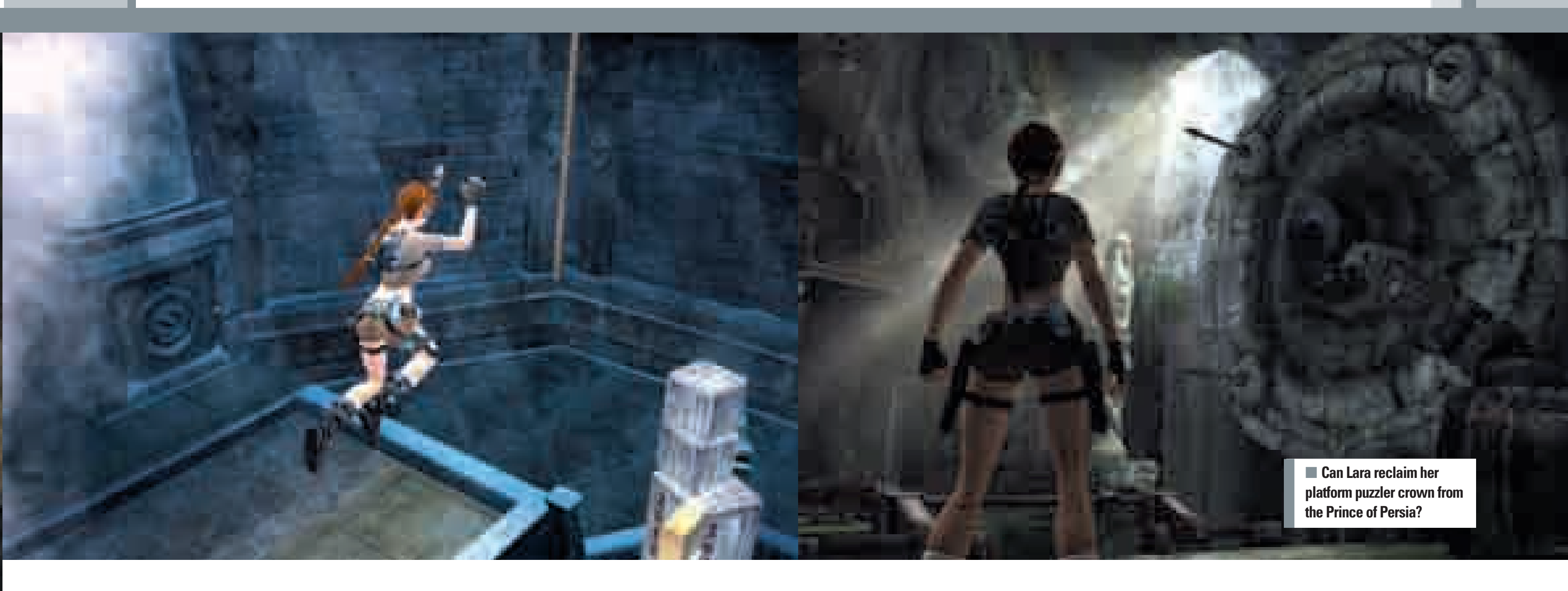
DEVELOPER PROFILE



■ Crystal Dynamics has been swallowed by Eidos, and logging onto the Crystal Dynamics website now takes you straight to the Eidos site. Of course, Eidos itself is soon to be a fibre between the teeth of SCi, but the company, famous for unleashing games such as *Galleon*, has now decided to adopt the Eidos logo as its own.

HISTORY

- **PROJECT: SNOWBLIND** 2005 [Multi]
- **WHIPLASH** 2004 [Multi]
- **LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE** 2004 [Multi]



■ Can Lara reclaim her platform puzzler crown from the Prince of Persia?

PHWOOOARR! CHECK OUT THE PIXELS ON THAT!

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics
RELEASE: Autumn '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ As if Lara Croft needs any sort of introduction… She's back, and with a certain Mr Gard in the driver's seat again our heroine looks better than ever.

The last we heard of Lara Croft, she'd checked herself into the Betty Ford Clinic For Failed Icons after her comeback in *Angel Of Darkness* spectacularly failed to impress even her most ardent fans. Looking back, it was obvious Miss Croft was just going through the motions as she stumbled across Paris, sneaking around when she really wanted to unload her pistols into a big dinosaur. Yet the poor lass had fallen into the most common of super-celebrity traps; in believing her own hype, she had begun to think herself infallible. And after the barely finished *Angel Of Darkness* crash landed, she was left bereft, crying bitter tears over a Mylar-bagged issue of *The Face*.

What Lara needed to pull herself out of the mire was a benefactor, and she found one in the unlikeliest of places. Original Croft designer Toby Gard was ushered back by Eidos, and as a result everyone's favourite videogame heroine has emerged a changed woman.

Perhaps it's as indicative of changing standards as much as a maturing of the videogame form, but the new Lara is no longer weighed down by the assets that got her recognised in the first place. Indeed, her chest – which had grown over previous adventures until it was so big her arms clipped through it – has shrunk back down to a healthy, natural size, while her face has been softened, making her simply more 'human'.

Her assets now take a different form: the classic *Tomb Raider* inventory now hangs visibly from her belt, enabling gamers to gauge their ammo and equipment without flicking to an item screen. We'd like to think this more practical approach is an apt symbol for Lara's rebirth adventure as a whole. After all, Lady Croft is a genuine legend, standing proudly in the pantheon of videogame greats with Mario and Pac-Man; she deserves an adventure befitting her stature, to remind us how important she is/was/can still be (delete as applicable after *Legend*'s release).

Nonetheless, there are many nay-sayers who are still unconvinced Lara can cut it in the modern gaming world. These cynics will be relieved to know that the next *Tomb Raider* title promises to feature some actual raiding of tombs, with the prospect of fighting a gigantic six-armed god statue-gone-Harryhausen, and a new range of athletic animations that flow together to make Lara more lithe than ever. The focus now, apparently, is on continuous motion, with Crystal Dynamics conscious of the design flaws of *Angel Of Darkness*.

But there will always be gamers who are merely interested in what Lara wears and how pert her arse looks in each ensemble; it seems this mac-wearing contingent will be catered for with levels in tombs, jungles and snow-capped mountains enabling a return to form not only in terms of gameplay, but also as a showcase for Lara to dress up. Plus there's a motorbike-riding section, so expect to see her in leathers too.

Early video looks slightly sketchy, but if Crystal Dynamics knows where to apply the make-up it may just be able to mask the crow's feet on our ageing starlet. All eyes are on the developer to produce the goods and live up to the ego-driven title it gave the game a year before its release.

> "IF CRYSTAL DYNAMICS KNOWS WHERE TO APPLY THE MAKE-UP IT MAY BE ABLE TO MASK OUR AGEING STARLET'S WRINKLES"

BRAND NEW YOU

So what does *Legend* offer the few of us who have stuck by Lara through her wilderness years? As well as revisiting the two-guns-blazing form of yesteryear, Miss Croft's next game also promises the return of a "nemesis from her past… long thought dead". So much for innovation. But let's face it – the story should be at least a little bit hokey, especially if the gameplay's up to scratch. So how about throwing Lara into a world with real-time physics, with fully implemented fire and water systems? Imagine solving puzzles freed from the constraints of four-direction box-shifting. And as Lara's due to get a new arsenal, including a 'personal lighting device' (which had better not be a flashlight), we're all the more intrigued.

STARCRAFT: GHOST

IN SPACE, NO-ONE CAN HEAR YOU BLOWING THE HELL OUT OF EVERYTHING

It seems that we've been waiting forever for the *StarCraft* series to arrive on consoles. The mythical *StarCraft: Ghost* has appeared at countless trade shows before disappearing again; we'd almost given up hope that Blizzard would ever get the damn thing finished. Yet now, thanks in part to the recently acquired Swingin' Ape Studios team, *StarCraft: Ghost* is not only coming out but has a number of new multiplayer goodies.

Despite the huge success of the PC versions of *StarCraft*, *Ghost* is a brand new game that's been specially designed with consoles in mind. This means that instead of the often shoddy ports that we've got used to when PC favourites go travelling, console owners are receiving their own specific take on the *StarCraft* universe.

StarCraft: Ghost puts you in the role of Nova, an Elite Ghost operative who's trained in espionage and tactical combat and who has had 20 years of conditioning to make her the best in her field. Some missions see her working in a group as she heads for massive planetary battles whereas other tasks are treacherous solo missions that are a mixture of smart decisions and all-out blasting. Luckily, Elite Ghosts have a number of useful abilities, including Sonic Speed to get past enemies and a cloak ability that makes it simple to sneak past guards and infiltrate the most heavily guarded of installations.

Nova has a huge arsenal of weapons, from flamethrowers to rifles, and there's a wide range of vehicles to commandeer when the going gets tough, many of which will be familiar to fans of the series, but again, console owners can expect some that are exclusive to this project. These were revealed for the first time at E3 and certainly add new levels of strategy to an already intelligent space adventure. Our heroine is also super fit (as in physically trained, not attractive) which means she can scale fences, hang from wires, scale walls and traverse tightropes.

WAITING FOR GODOT

So what's been taking them so long? It seems that the good people at Blizzard Entertainment are perfectionists of the highest order, meaning that this game has slipped off the radar more times than we care to mention. The official reason? Well, in 2004 Blizzard said, "We are very committed to *StarCraft: Ghost* as a major part of our line-up. As a result, we plan to build additional time into the schedule to polish the game until it meets the high standards that our customers have come to expect from Blizzard products. We are sorry to disappoint players with a delayed launch but are confident that we will deliver a great game with the additional development time." Let's hope that time was used wisely…

> "CONSOLE OWNERS ARE FINALLY GETTING THEIR OWN TAKE ON THE STARCRAFT WORLD"

As well as Nova's natural abilities, there are a number of devastating attacks that can be called upon, from simple air strikes to nuclear detonations. For more subtle affairs, Nova is armed with a Canister Rifle that can be used in a Sniper mode at any time you need to pick someone off without bringing attention to yourself.

While the single-player Story mode raised some interest at E3, it's the all-new multiplayer additions that are getting us really excited. Swingin' Ape Studios joined Blizzard in 2004 and we're seeing the fruits of their labours with new eight-player challenges, with multiplayer options on Xbox Live and PlayStation2. As well as more familiar multiplayer thrills, the company has revealed Capture The Base mode where two teams of four take on the personas of different *StarCraft* characters as they battle to control a flying space station.

With its mixture of over-the-top action, stealth and stylish characters, *StarCraft: Ghost* managed to hold our interest at E3, even after all these years of waiting. Just get it out this year, eh, Blizzard?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Blizzard
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-8

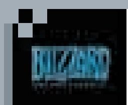
CONCEPT

Our heroine uses stealth and all-out action to ensure success. Fans of the PC classics should start queuing now.



We're not really sure what that is, but we suggest you shoot it before it gets angry…

Sniper mode means you don't have to get too close to these ugly looking things.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Blizzard Entertainment is best known for its successes on PC with not only the *StarCraft* series but also such smashes as *Diablo*. It also controls the free internet service Battle.net, which is thought to be the largest in the world and allows for multiplayer action with many of Blizzard's top titles.

HISTORY

- **WORLD OF WARCRAFT** 2004 [PC]
- **DIABLO** 2000 [PC]
- **STARCRAFT** 1998 [PC]

Use Nova's stealth abilities to sneak past guards without attracting unwanted attention.

"BECAUSE THE MULTIPLAYER ELEMENTS OF STARCRAFT PROVED SO POPULAR, WE FELT IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR GHOST TO HAVE A STRONG MULTIPLAYER COMPONENT"

MIKE MORHAIME, PRESIDENT, BLIZZARD

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

A SPACE ADVENTURE WITH A FEISTY HEROINE, YOU SAY?

ALIEN + TOMB RAIDER + P.N.03 = STARCRAFT: GHOST

QUAKE IV



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

A BIT OF EVERYTHING

DOOM 3 + HALO 2 x BROTHERS IN ARMS = QUAKE IV

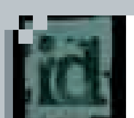
"WE'RE EXCITED TO BRING THE NEXT-GENERATION EXPERIENCE TO A NEW BREED OF CONSOLE GAME FANS"

TODD HOLLENSHEAD, CEO, ID

Expect to be climbing into Mech-armour to kick even more Strogg ass.

Expect blood, gore and plenty of other excuses to slap an '18' on the box.





DEVELOPER PROFILE

id *is* first-person shooters. There's no other way to describe the pedigree of the Texas-based developer which is responsible for *Doom*, *Quake* and *Castle Wolfenstein* to name but a few. Chances are, if you've fired digital bullets in anger during the last few years, id made those bullets and provoked that anger.

HISTORY

- **DOOM 3** 2004 [PC]
- **RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN** 2002 [PC]
- **QUAKE III** 1999 [PC]



DID THE EARTH MOVE FOR YOU TOO?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: id
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16

CONCEPT

The latest and greatest in the *Quake* series takes the player back into story-based combat that sees humanity fighting for survival against age-old enemies The Strogg.

What with all the *Doom*s and *Halo*s of this world, it seemed that all had fallen quiet on the *Quake* front until the latest incarnation of the classic FPS exploded onto the scene at E3. Heading towards Xbox 360 and PC the title is undoubtedly the gem in Activision's line-up for the next generation, and judging by what we've seen so far, the publisher has scored yet another top-drawer game.

The series is heading back to where *Quake II* left off all those years ago, with humanity once again at war with The Strogg. However, this game is giving much more weight to its narrative, so instead of namelessly running and gunning, your character, Matthew Kain, is in the middle of a full-scale war. This means that you'll fight alongside friendly AI team-mates, each with their own idiosyncrasies that you'll learn to love or loathe during the game.

Despite this, the emphasis will still be on first-person combat, and everything in the game will be seen through Kain's eyes, including the gradual dwindling of Rhino Squad and the terrible transformation he suffers when captured by The Strogg. An early sequence from *Quake IV* shows Kain being turned into a Strogg piece by piece.

> "QUAKE IV IS THE DADDY OF NEXT-GEN SHOOTERS"

This gory process – which involves a needle being rammed into your head and having your legs amputated – is mercifully halted just before Kain is turned totally Strogg, leaving your character superhuman. He can jump higher, run faster and survive longer than his comrades – a neat excuse as to why you'll always live longer than most of your fellow soldiers.

Quake is renowned for its multiplayer element, and id is keen to emphasise that the quality of this area of the game will remain high despite the overhaul of the single-player mode. Whereas the main campaign will probably start to feel more like *Halo 2*, the online play will be as familiar to *Quake* players as their own mothers. In fact, id and Raven have said that the multiplayer won't be a drastic change from the third game, as it's still one of the PC's most popular deathmatch titles.

There will be the obvious visual overhaul, and the player count on both Xbox 360 and PC may be slightly higher, but aside from this the core gameplay will remain the same. This will even include the return of many classic arenas, but so far the developer hasn't said which ones they'll be. The only possible letdown is that the BFG won't be making a return, instead being replaced by a new superweapon that's being kept under wraps.

Xbox 360 owners will be given a taste of the modding options that have been a defining feature of the *Quake* series, as id is again including the ability to alter weaponry to suit your style of play. Whether console owners will be able to use the new Live Marketplace with *Quake IV* is not confirmed, but it seems the game would be an ideal candidate for experimentation with the service. With no *Halo 3* officially in the pipeline yet, *Quake IV* is the daddy of next-gen shooters, and will undoubtedly rule broadband cables well into 2006.

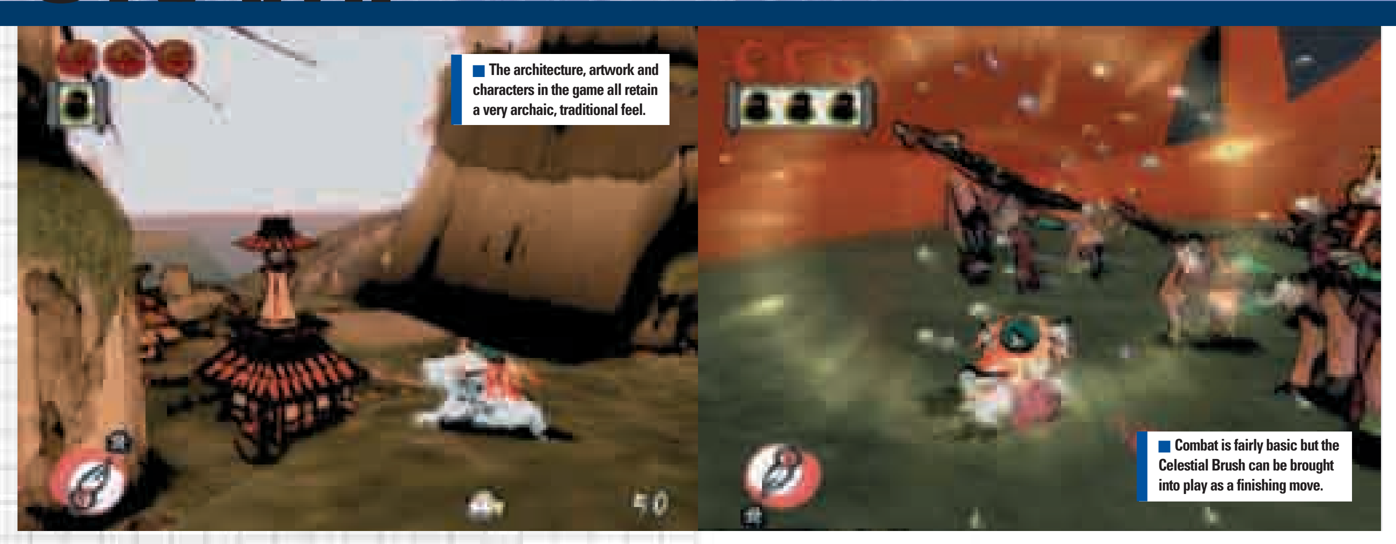
KNOW YOUR STROGG

Newcomers to *Quake* have no need to feel left out because they've joined the series late, as *Quake IV* explains the history of the conflict between humans and The Strogg during the first few scenes of the game. Following on from *Quake II*, the humans believe The Strogg to be defeated after the death of their Hive-mind. However, things are not as they seem, as the half-creatures/half-machines have picked up another leader and are preparing to wage war once again. Hero Kain is sent in as part of Rhino Squad, an elite force whose mission is to destroy the Hive-mind again. Unfortunately, as is to be expected, The Strogg anticipate this move and ambush the team as they land, which is where the game begins in earnest…



Your squad will play a large role in *Quake IV* as id tries to make the plot as fun as the guns.

OKAMI



■ The architecture, artwork and characters in the game all retain a very archaic, traditional feel.

■ Combat is fairly basic but the Celestial Brush can be brought into play as a finishing move.

BEAUTY OVERCOMES DARKNESS IN A GORGEOUS NEW CAPCOM ADVENTURE

Amid the fragrant crowds and attention-seeking publishers at E3, only a few games truly shine. This year, along with *Burnout Revenge* and the new *Zelda* game, *Okami* was one of the real highlights. Unlike those other two titles, though, *Okami* is an entirely new departure for the Capcom-owned Clover Studios, which, after pushing the 2D beat-'em-up genre to the visual limit with *Viewtiful Joe*, is now turning its attention to this beautiful mythological adventure.

Okami features a world devoid of colour, a version of Japan darkened by the presence of an evil monster. The player must guide a sun goddess, Amaterasu, in restoring brightness to the world. Amaterasu takes the form of a wolf, and must complete various tasks and re-learn all her celestial powers in order to bring colour back to the world. The silent goddess is helped by a fairy-like companion and a few spiritual guides who aid her in retrieving her powers

The game's visual style is exceptionally striking and is *Okami*'s most distinctive feature. The game world is rendered in beautiful watercolour tones and looks as if it's painted on rough canvas; it's slightly reminiscent of *Wind Waker*'s cel-shading, but has more in common with the archaic style of the cartoon series *Samurai Jack*. The animation flows wonderfully, with flowers sprouting from the ground wherever Amaterasu runs and lily pads appearing in the water at her divine touch.

Due in part to this unique artistic direction, *Okami* has a heavily mythological feel. The fact that everything looks like it's been painted on years-old canvas coupled with the delicacy of the watercolour tones gives the game an archaic ambience. In fact, Amaterasu is a real figure from Japanese mythology, and many of the game's early scenarios reflect Japanese fables. The mirror that the wolf-form of Amaterasu wears on her back in the game refers to the mirror that hangs in the goddess' shrine in Japan. Even the name of the game is a shortened form of Amaterasu's other name, Omikami.

The demo level at E3 was a free-roaming affair that asked the player to retrieve a giant peach that contained the region's colour. It was in completing this task that the game's most intriguing gameplay feature, the Celestial Brush, was revealed. By holding R1 at any time, the player can turn the screen into a brown canvas and use the Square button to draw on it with Amaterasu's tail. This power is what makes *Okami* so different and intriguing, and it allows the player all sorts of inventive opportunities.

The skill is introduced via one of Amaterasu's spiritual guides, who challenges her to complete a constellation in the sky in order to create a celestial animal. Using this newly earned power, the wolf-goddess can build bridges over water, draw lines through rocks and other objects in order to slash them in half, and circle trees to make them blossom with colour. It even has its uses in combat (see boxout).

Clover Studios has let its imagination run wild with *Okami*, the game's style and innovative features making it stand out a mile at E3. The game isn't due for a while, so this will be the year of waiting patiently.

> "THE ANIMATION FLOWS BEAUTIFULLY – FLOWERS SPROUT WHEREVER AMATERASU RUNS AND LILY PADS APPEAR IN WATER AT HER DIVINE TOUCH"

DIVINE DOODLING

The Celestial Brush affords Amaterasu an enormous variety of powers, only a few of which were in the demo. Though it could seem like a vaguely Nintendo DS-like gimmick, the Brush is integral to gameplay. Its uses in combat could be particularly intriguing, though fighting is still fairly basic – the enemies in the E3 demo could mostly be destroyed by Amaterasu's head-butt and other combat moves, but it is possible (and extremely satisfying) to finish an enemy by slashing through it with the Celestial Brush, causing flowers to blossom where it falls. We've seen other Celestial Brush powers, such as drawing eddies of wind and vine ropes to whip Amaterasu over gaps that can't be bridged, making this a hugely innovative title.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 2006
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ This vaguely *Zelda*-esque adventure from Capcom combines gentle puzzle-solving with breathtaking artistic flair and Japanese mythology.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Capcom's Clover Studio is renowned for its art direction – these are the lovely people who brought us *Viewtiful Joe*. Its development profile is limited to the *VJ* games at present, but resident talent includes Shinji Mikami of *Resident Evil* fame, and *Devil May Cry* director Hideki Kamiya.

HISTORY

- **VIEWTIFUL JOE 2** 2004 [Multi]
- **VIEWTIFUL JOE** 2003 [Cube]
- **RESIDENT EVIL** 1996 [Multi]

Sadly, *Okami's* Japanese visual style runs the risk of being affected by the translation into English.

The in-game environment is often absolutely stunning – screenshots just can't convey the game's fluid movement.

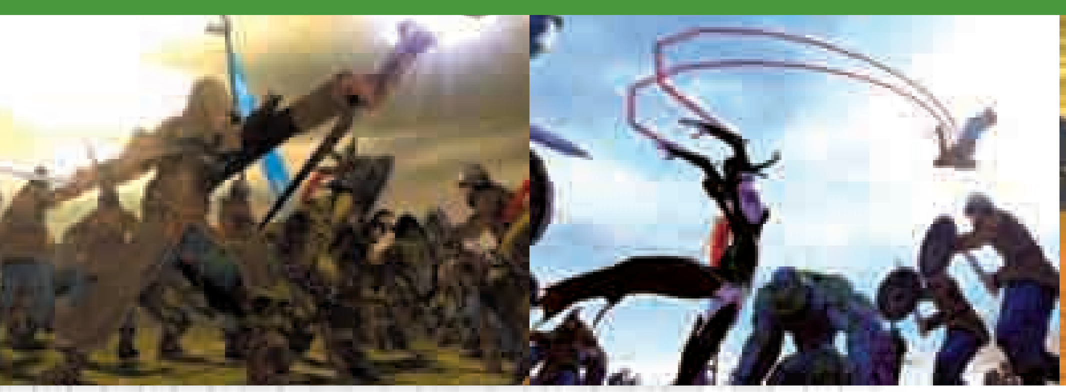
"OKAMI COMBINES FOLKLORE AND MYSTICISM TO BRING FORTH AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MYTHOLOGICAL MATHEMATICS

ONE MAN AND HIS DOG - MAN x TRADITIONAL JAPANESE ART = OKAMI

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: HEROES





The ogre's size isn't just for show – he can pull opponents to pieces. Which hurts.

"WHERE'S THE STREETWISE HERCULES TO FIGHT THE RISING ODDS?"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Korea
PUBLISHER: Koch Media
DEVELOPER: Phantagram
RELEASE: Sept '05
GENRE: Strategy Action
PLAYERS: 1 (2-6 online)

CONCEPT

More units meet for chaotic combat and involving strategy.

Here at games™, we like surprises. Not the 'Guess what? We're making a sequel to *GoldenEye*!' kind of surprise, you understand – the more pleasant kind. Midway's wonderful *Psi-Ops* pretty much coming out of nowhere to be one of the best games of 2004, *Katamari Damacy* getting a US release, and *Disgaea* actually having an ending, for instance.

Imagine our delight, then, to have a two-fold surprise in the shape of *Kingdom Under Fire* – first, to have *Crusaders* turn out to be such a strong game but, more recently, to have a sequel due within 12 months of the last game. Phantagram, you're too good to us. Better yet, the developer isn't stupid. It knows that what it's got isn't broken so it doesn't need fixing – it just needs more added to it to invigorate the unique formula and keep it from feeling like the kind of cynical cash-in sequel we're all too used to.

Heroes is set several years prior to *Crusaders*, meaning it documents the rise of many characters that go on to play secondary roles such as generals – Lucretia's vampiric cohort Morene takes one such starring role, as does Rupert the hammer-wielding maniac officer who served Gerald so well. So yeah, the names are as good as ever. Better yet are some of the other new characters. Urukubarr is a particular favourite thus far – the ogre makes his playable debut in *Heroes* and likes nothing better than throwing the good guys around like dirty toys. It's silly awesome, it really is.

If you didn't like *Crusaders*, the bad news is that Phantagram has focused so heavily on improving what it already had that fundamental changes are few. The game follows the same strategy map/hack-and-slash formula as before, but with seven different stories to play through, a random mission generator and the prospect of six-way online play we're wishing away the days until September. Other than that, it's business as usual for our crew of silly-named badass warriors.

Scything through even larger crowds of enemies for the good of the land is a taxing job but there are few things so grimly rewarding as seeing the piles of bodies you leave in your wake like a macabre trail of breadcrumbs. Good luck tackling any of the characters at Hard level or above, though – never again will you question anyone who tells you that war is hell.



With a name like Rupert it's no surprise he's so hardcore. Loves his hitty smackage, too…

"THE SURPRISINGLY SUCCESSFUL BLEND OF ACTION AND STRATEGY HAS BEEN FURTHER TWEAKED FOR HEROES"


eMag

BURNOUT REVENGE



Try not to pick a fight with someone bigger than you. You'll lose.

Be warned: anything too big to check will have its hazard lights flashing.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

A DISH BEST SERVED HOT

BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN + SPEED x PIMPED = BURNOUT REVENGE

"BURNOUT REVENGE LETS GAMERS RIP THROUGH RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC AND LAY WASTE TO SCORES OF RUBBERNECKING ROAD HOGS IN AN OVER-THE-TOP SCENE OF VEHICULAR MAYHEM"

EA PRESS RELEASE

BURNOUT REVENGE
PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Creator of the acclaimed RenderWare technology, used in over a quarter of all titles currently in development, Criterion continues to push the boundaries of development technology and gameplay quality. PlayStation2 owners in particular owe these guys a big thank you for keeping the visual standard of their titles so high.

HISTORY

- **BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN** 2004 [PS2]
- **BURNOUT 2: POINT OF IMPACT** 2002 [PS2]
- **AIRBLADE** 2001 [PS2]

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Criterion Games
RELEASE: Oct '05 (US: 13 Sept)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-8

CONCEPT

High-speed chaos from one of the finest arcade racing series ever released on any console – *Revenge* promises new race modes, a smoother online service and even more car carnage.

THE HIGH-SPEED SERIES IS BACK TO TAKE YOU DOWN

We'd almost dispensed with the sunglasses used to hide the effects of yet another late-night, high-speed, vision-blurring *Burnout 3* session, but after seeing the latest addition to the series it looks like the shades will be going back on… and staying on. *Revenge* is looking good – awesome, in fact – and is set to blow its competition off the tarmac.

When we got behind the wheel of *Burnout 3: Takedown* last year it was a revolutionary experience, so we gave it a perfect ten. Our dilemma now is what to make of a game that's looking to outshine even that. *Revenge* is more attractive than the previous game and doesn't lose anything in terms of speed and frame rate. It certainly hasn't lost anything in terms of action either, with the addition of the frantic Traffic Attack mode that plays out like a normal arcade race mode but with a twist: instead of aiming for checkpoints to increase your time, top-ups come in the form of other racers – slam into another car to receive a time and Boost bonus.

This mode allows you turn small vehicles into weapons by shunting them around to achieve a Takedown, or by causing a pile-up to block an opponent's path. The goal of the race is to score as many points as possible by checking the most cars – the more destruction caused the better. At first this seems simple but as the time ticks down your heart rate goes through the roof as you struggle to make it to the next hapless victim.

Criterion has also been tinkering with the Crash mode by implementing a new system that has drawn a few comparisons with golf games, namely a moving on-screen meter that requires timed button presses to determine your Boost level. Along with your golf game-style gauge you also have a target vehicle to hit on the track – take it down and you're lavished with points aplenty as well as an instant Crash Breaker.

The likes of Crash Breakers and Boost play an even more important role now as many of the old pick-ups sit this one out; however, your Crash Breaker can be used at any time, making for some serious metal-crunching chaos. *Revenge* also offers a greater variety of crash possibilities as alongside the destructive stunts you can also perform mid-air Takedowns that show off the beauty of the game's physics engine.

As the title suggests, this game is all about revenge, and if you come packing some pent-up rage you can certainly vent it during the race. In fact, you're actively encouraged to take down cars that have roughed you up, but in turn there will be drivers who are looking to take you out. All of this is made sweeter by the promise of a smoother online service (we'll believe it when we see it) offering every race mode.

Before we got our hands on *Revenge* we doubted Criterion could improve dramatically on *Takedown*, but from only the first few revs of the engine this looks set to destroy any challengers that have designs on *Burnout*'s podium place.

> "FROM THE FIRST REVS OF THE ENGINE IT'S CLEAR REVENGE WILL BLOW THE COMPETITION CLEAN OFF THE TARMAC"

TRACK RECORD

Tracks announced so far include Detroit, Tokyo and Rome and all look like nothing seen in previous *Burnouts*. There are plenty of neon-lit streets in the urban areas and a more muted palette for places like Rome, adding an extra touch of realism. Many tracks have multi-tiered layouts with ramps ideal for boosting, though it's often only by using these ramps that you discover the short cuts and alternative routes through each course. But the best news relates to the Crash Junctions, which used to be on sections of track found in the race mode but now have their own locales, so what was once a distraction is now a new mode to master.



Courses look more realistic with the inclusion of urban and industrial settings.

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS



Characters will be more defined than Rockstar's cartoon style, so this definitely isn't *Vice City*.

F**K CASPER GOMEZ! AND F**K THE F**KIN' DIAZ BROTHERS! F**K 'EM ALL!

PS2

During the filming of *Salvador*, limousine-liberal director Oliver Stone received help, quite freely, from bloodied members of South American death squads. They were huge fans of his script for *Scarface*. Indeed, the special edition DVD of the film occasionally comes shrink-wrapped with a circular sticker on top. The sticker is a message from a marketing team saying that many modern hip-hop stars have found inspiration in the film, and have based their rhythmic limericks and attitude on the story of a complete arse, Tony Montana.

Scarface: The World is Yours doesn't follow the plot of the film and doesn't have a script by Oliver Stone. What it does do is attempt to answer a question that only marketing teams and people not satisfied with the violent resolution of the movie might ask: what would happen if Tony Montana had survived the assault on his mansion by a drugs cartel if it were played out via a videogame? He'd most probably build up his recently (coincidentally/ conveniently?) destroyed empire by running and driving around Miami, smuggling and dealing coke, and killing his four main rivals over four territories in a third-person action adventure.

He'd probably have a Balls meter too, one that builds up as you perform well and allows you to enter Berserker mode. He does. This may be taken by some to be funny, and it does tie in with Tony Montana's machismo. We just don't want to encourage EA to include Respect point-fuelled beatings in *The Godfather*.

Ironically, out of the two franchise molestations *Scarface* is superficially more in keeping with the core of the film's main characters, Montana's explosive instability perfect for debasing into the equally erratic engagements of a videogame marionette. It's not quite *Robocop* acceptable, but it's close. And it's not a painted simulacrum of *Grand Theft Auto*. When you get the money, you get the power. You may only get the women in cut-scenes, but you can get one of your goons to drive you around.

As Tony's influence grows, so he can get his hoods to take care of small business while he eyes a bigger prize. You won't have to bust your hump selling two grams to chemically tanned sales executives for long and there's no plan for a cut-scene in which you cut your stash with baking soda and/or rat poison. You do, however get to set up shops as fronts for shifting mammoth quantities of nose candy.

Tony doesn't snort the stuff any more and has learned not to get high on his own supply so (surprisingly) the health bar isn't a percentage of how much charlie you've ingested, even if the film's death scene does suggest that it must have been more than the power of method acting that kept him killing with catchphrases and blood bags. Those who fear another *Narc* can take a load off. This won't play out like that.

To get back on top you've got to start from your roots and that means selling coke, and to sell coke you've got to smuggle it into Miami, primarily in your own speedboat. Radical has even gone to the trouble of inventing four islands off the Miami coast from where you can hide from the DEA and plot your comeback.

It looks like this could turn out to be an amusing, pop culturally aware title. Really. Once you accept that the film only stands up to modern criticism thanks to Pacino's performance and Stone's exceptional script there really isn't anything to fear. This, however, should not give SCi the notion of making an *Apocalypse Now* game. And we still have nightmares about Davilex's *Miami Vice*...

> "THOSE WHO FEAR ANOTHER NARC CAN TAKE A LOAD OFF. THIS WON'T PLAY OUT LIKE THAT"

OKAY, HERE'S THE BAD GUY

While Pacino's strained skull of a face will make it into the game there's been nothing more than allusions concerning his actual voice. The game will, however, feature both digital masks and the voices of Robert Loggia and Steven Bauer (who played Frank Lopez and Manny Ray in the flick) as well as James Woods, Miguel Sandoval, Robert Davi, Michael Rappaport and comedians Jay Mohr and Cheech Marin. Michael York is in there too, hopefully not reprising his role of Basil Exposition from the *Austin Powers* ego trips.

DETAILS

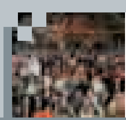
FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment
RELEASE: Autumn '05
GENRE: Arcade Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

GTA: Vice City borrowed elements from the film *Scarface*, the game *Scarface* borrows elements from *Vice City*. What if Tony Montana survived the movie? He'd be in this game.

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Radical Entertainment is based in Vancouver, Canada. It's produced games for THQ and Vivendi ranging from *Tetris Worlds* to the soft-*GTA*-in-yellow *The Simpsons Hit & Run*. As this image shows it's staffed by what seems to be most of the country. It's not. It just looks that way.

HISTORY

■ **CRASH TAG TEAM RACING** 2005 [PS2]
■ **THE SIMPSONS HIT & RUN** 2003 [Multi]
■ **DARK SUMMIT** 2002 [Xbox]

"THE TREACHEROUS WORLD OF SCARFACE IS A NATURAL PROPERTY TO TRANSLATE INTO A CINEMATIC GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCE"

MICHAEL POLE, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SCAREFACE

THE MOVIE + GTA: VICE CITY + BALLS = SCARFACE

■ Bodies will react to specific area attacks, unlike *Vice City*. And no, nothing like *Driv3r*.

■ The soundtrack will feature music from the film and from the period. No, this isn't *Vice City*.

DEAD OR ALIVE 4

THE BEAT-'EM-UP WORLD'S FEMMES FATALES PROVE FOUR IS THE MAGIC NUMBER



It's not just the ladies who are lovely. Look at his hair – gorgeous! Check out the interactive scenery – phwoar! etc…

As far as high-octane introductions go, *Dead Or Alive 4*'s bow to the gaming world was more of a head butt. Tecmo's trailer cried for attention with its attention to detail and visual flourishes, kicking up dust as it screamed along at a breakneck pace. This fourth iteration recognises that the interactive scenery is a major selling point and so Las Vegas now comes with traffic to kick characters into, dojos have ravines outside that let you run along their walls, even Jann Lee abandons kung fu to surf his opponent down stairs. *Dead Or Alive 4* sees the series playing to its strength of elastic, comic-book violence.

Behind the glitz, *Dead Or Alive 4* is promising moves that fall into 'defensive' and 'offensive' categories rather than having a universal neutral stance. Think Vanessa in *Virtua Fighter 4* for the nearest comparison. Throw in promises of tweaks to the countering system, with 'scenery counters' also added to the defensive DNA, and there are more than enough gameplay adjustments to justify this sequel. There will be three new faces, with pretty boy Eliot and high-flying Lisa the most interesting from a gameplay and stylistic standpoint. Otherwise, expect old favourites Lei Fang, Helena, Hitomi et al with Christie also playable following her *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* sabbatical.

> "DEAD OR ALIVE 4 SEES THE SERIES PLAYING TO ITS STRENGTH OF ELASTIC, COMIC-BOOK VIOLENCE"

Online play now has scoreboards and a 'clan' feature, hoping to step in where arcade tournaments are slowly dying. It's looking like an early test of strength for Xbox 360's renewed assault on online gaming, a launch title that promises to put the reinforced Xbox Live infrastructure to good use. Whether or not the crippling lag of *Ultimate* is addressed in this sequel, however, is a different matter.

So perhaps given the familiarity after the visual high-spec skirt flashing, it wasn't a surprise to see *Dead Or Alive 4* just miss out on the Microsoft hype bandwagon for Xbox 360. Tongues are wagging about PS3 *Tekken* despite no gameplay footage being shown, and the hardcore beat-'em-up contingent have already flocked to *Virtua Fighter*'s corner, leaving *Dead Or Alive 4* in a middle ground between the two. We'll have to wait and see if it has the swagger to make that middle ground a corner of its own.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Tecmo
DEVELOPER: Team Ninja
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Q4 '05)
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Lessons learnt from *Dead Or Alive 3* and *Ultimate* are put to good use…



Falling cherry blossom, splashes of water and real-time lighting effects – it's all in here and looking stunning.


eMag

THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO



Though Neo will face a variety of enemies, the Agents (and of course Agent Smith) make frequent appearances.

> "GAMERS WILL PLAY AS 'NEO' BUT FROM THE MOMENT THE GAME BEGINS – HOW THE SITUATIONS PLAY OUT, HOW THEY HANDLE THEM – IT'S ALL UP TO THE GAMER"
>
> ATARI PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

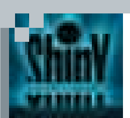
"HE'S BEGINNING TO BELIEVE..."

ENTER THE MATRIX + NEO - LAMENESS = PATH OF NEO

Yes, we know all the enemies look identical – they're computer generated, so it's okay. Really.

THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

As well as the infamous *Enter The Matrix*, Shiny Entertainment was responsible for the delightfully bizarre *Earthworm Jim* games in the Nineties. Based in California, the developer's partnership with Atari in making *Matrix*-based games has proved very profitable, but hasn't yet yielded a decent game.

HISTORY

- **ENTER THE MATRIX** 2003 [Multi]
- **SACRIFICE** 2000 [PC]
- **EARTHWORM JIM** 1995 [SNES]



Once again, physics-defying bullet time moves allow for some ridiculous stunts, such as running up walls in slow motion.

BACK DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE FOR MORE MATRIX ACTION

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Shiny Entertainment
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

With this new *Matrix* game, players will finally be able to step into Neo's shoes and re-enact key scenes from the movie trilogy.

PS2

***Enter The Matrix* may have sold millions of copies but it had problems. Oh, so many problems.** If ever there was proof that even the snazziest licence can't save a game from atrocity, *Enter The Matrix* was it. It's understandable, then, that we're approaching *Path Of Neo* with a degree of wariness. That said, Shiny and Atari's second *Matrix*-themed effort looks to be a considerable improvement on the franchise's last spin-off.

Where before you stepped into the shoes of two of the secondary characters from *Matrix Revolutions*, we can now do what everyone has wanted to do all along and become Neo on his journey to become the One. Fans' wants and needs appear to have been fully taken into consideration in *Path Of Neo*; almost every scenario from the film is playable, from Neo's training with Morpheus to the infamous lobby scene to the final watery showdown with Agent Smith (yes, all 2,000 of him).

Of course, as with the films, flashy effects are of paramount importance. Just like in *Enter The Matrix*, bullet time and assorted special moves are implemented to optimum effect. Neo can run up walls, dodge bullets, leap over ten-foot gaps and generally defy gravity to his heart's content. The special effects are impressive, and though they don't have the 'wow' factor that they had when the first film arrived in 1999, they keep the game authentic to the movies and create a very cinematic feel.

Although it shares the same basic engine as *Enter The Matrix*, *Path Of Neo* will improve substantially upon it (which, admittedly, wouldn't be too difficult). The original horrors of appalling AI, a ropey battle system and endless debilitating bugs, not to mention the camera, are all set to change. Despite *Enter The Matrix*'s integration with the film and extra scenes, many people felt that the pain and frustration of playing through levels in order to see them just wasn't worth it. Happily, early play of *Path Of Neo* reveals a much more fluid, varied control system and a player-controlled camera that adds to the cinematic ambience.

Perhaps the most intriguing thing about *Path Of Neo* is that it's not entirely scripted. Where almost all movie-licensed games follow the course of their namesake's plot, *Path Of Neo* allows for a little more flexibility. Your actions will affect the course of the story, not just follow the films to the letter; you may succeed where Neo fails in the film and, presumably, affect what happens elsewhere in the story. Though the extent to which this feature will be implemented is not yet clear, it could add some much-needed freedom and variety to proceedings and provide some incentive for replays.

What we've played (all two levels of the game) indicates that Shiny is staying true to its word but it still remains to be seen whether *Path Of Neo* will deliver the ultimate *Matrix* game experience. The opportunity to re-enact the story as Neo is something that many fans will find extremely attractive, but it won't save the game from mediocrity if the execution is as lacklustre as before. Luckily, it looks as if a genuine effort is being made to make *Path Of Neo* a valid and enjoyable part of the *Matrix* saga.

"SHINY'S SECOND MATRIX-THEMED EFFORT LOOKS TO BE AN IMPROVEMENT ON THE FRANCHISE'S LAST SPIN-OFF"

BULLET-TIME BATTLING

***Path Of Neo*'s combat system is a big improvement on the clunkiness of *Enter The Matrix*'s. You can still use gunplay and various martial arts moves to deal out punishment to policemen, agents and anyone else that stands in your way. This time, though, there is a greater variety of combos and martial arts moves on offer, as should be expected of the One. The hand-to-hand combat flows more freely and the controls feel much easier to learn. The gunplay, too, is easy to pick up, incorporating a lock-on feature that facilitates easy targeting. The combat does seem somewhat scripted – a series of combos often takes a long time to execute – but the martial arts are at least consistent with the stunts seen in the films.**

GOTHIC 3

Q. WHAT'S BIG IN GERMANY AND HAS A DINOSAUR IN IT? A. NOT A DAVID HASSELHOFF VIDEO…

Not many people in the UK know of Piranha Bytes' critically acclaimed *Gothic* series. The first two instalments depicted an epic struggle between human and Orc, set in an alternative reality. Hardly sounds original, does it? But throw in a handful of extremely large and angry dinosaurs and things take a turn for the better. With *Gothic 3*, Piranha Bytes wants to expand on everything it achieved with the first two games and, with modern PC technology, finally do justice to its vision.

So what happens in the universe of *Gothic*? Well, first the player can choose whether to represent the humans or the Orcs, which will impact on gameplay in the usual way. Humans will hate you if you hang out with the Orcs; likewise, siding with the weaker humans will have Orcs baying for your blood. *Gothic* is a 'sandbox' world, a *Fable*-esque space that happily exists irrelevant of the player's presence – the protagonist is free to run around the many settlements interacting with whoever and acting however. Just like *Fable*, then.

How *Gothic* is trying to stand out from the crowd (aside from chucking in some massive dinosaurs) is by using the considerable heft of top-end PCs to create a world more immersive than anything seen before. And the world is stunning, mixing the high-res sheen of *Doom 3* with *FarCry*'s wide expanses, while creatures move with a fluidity and muscularity that will eventually become standard as we move into the next generation.

So what of the dinosaurs? By now, eyes will have been cast over the magnificent lizards roaring across these pages. *Gothic* is set in a world where dinosaurs exist, but they're not central to the game's plot. Imagine, if you will, walking through a maze that's inhabited by all manner of wildlife: birds, foxes, perhaps even a hedgehog. However much these animals may help or hinder you, the aim of the maze is not altered. Your reason for being in the maze is to get to the centre, and anything else is superfluous. *Gothic 3* is like this. The storyline may not concern the dinosaurs, but they will certainly affect the player's existence. Just walking around at night and hearing the call of the T-Rex is enough to confirm that.

Gothic 3 is controlled entirely with the mouse using a drag-and-drop menu system, meaning that it's one of the very few games that can be controlled completely with one hand. Good news for hotdog lovers and smokers everywhere. The danger Piranha Bytes must be careful to avoid is the similarity its title bears to the likes of *Fable* and the *Ultima* series. Sandbox freedom does not carry the same appeal that it did a few years ago and, if *Gothic 3* is to reach the audience it wants, it must offer PC gamers something new. At this early stage, it seems to build upon ideas seen in previous games but does not add many layers of depth.

There's still plenty of development time left for Piranha Bytes to demonstrate what its game is truly capable of, and if it will prove to be significantly more than a dinosaur-infested *Ultima*. Still, we'll be keeping a close eye on *Gothic 3*, as the potential is there for something remarkable when it arrives early next year.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: JoWood
DEVELOPER: Piranha Bytes
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Gothic 3 is much like a first-person *Fable*, with a handful of dinosaurs and a smattering of Orcs. Germans can't get enough of it.

BREATHE DEEP

How many times have the words 'living, breathing world/city' been used when describing games since *GTA III*? It's an easy escape for a publisher wanting to evoke happy memories of running around with an afro and a rocket launcher. So how does *Gothic 3* 'live and breathe'? First, it has a very accomplished day/night cycle, one that makes sense and is completely real time – shops and houses will be deserted at night as people sleep. Secondly, the NPCs show a level of intelligence that befits the 'living/breathing' tagline. Should you choose to violently bludgeon a villager in a particular settlement then take a stroll to the other side of the world, don't be in any doubt that your victim's family and friends will remember you. Return to the scene of the crime and you'll be exposed then hunted down by bereaved townsmen.

> "GOTHIC 3 MIXES THE HIGH-RES SHEEN OF DOOM 3 WITH FARCRY'S WIDE EXPANSES"



Hornrammers. A rhinosaur, if you will. Be careful when herds of these come thundering past.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

The Germany-based Piranha Bytes was set up in 1997, founded by five former employees of Greenwood Entertainment Software. After finding success with its first project, *Gothic*, Piranha Bytes has now established a successful RPG franchise, and hopes its latest title reaches a wider audience.

HISTORY

- **GOTHIC II: NIGHT OF THE RAVEN** 2003 [PC]
- **GOTHIC** 2001 [PC]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DINO CRISIS

FABLE + DINOSAURS x MOUSE = GOTHIC 3

"GOTHIC 3 PROVIDES A LIVING WORLD WHERE THE PLAYERS CAN FREELY CHOOSE THE WAY THEY WANT TO PLAY"
JOWOOD PRESS RELEASE

The poor Hornrammer was no match for the might of the T-Rex. It should have stood still.

Towering above the competition, the environments are magnificent and take full advantage of current PC power.

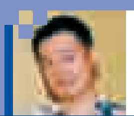
ONIMUSHA 4: DAWN OF DREAMS



■ The cherry blossoms may look pretty, but they're making the Emperor lose his mind.

■ Soki, the blindingly blond star of *Dawn Of Dreams*, uses two broadswords to best his foes.

"THE SCALE OF ENVIRONMENTS HAS BEEN MULTIPLIED IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE A MORE OPEN-ENDED GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCE"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Keiji Inafune has enjoyed a successful run at Capcom for the best part of two decades. He's progressed from lead character designer on all the *Mega Man* games to head producer for the acclaimed *Onimusha* series. Inafune is now head of Capcom's Studio 2, also responsible for the recent *Shadow Of Rome*.

HISTORY

- **SHADOW OF ROME** 2005 [PS2]
- **ONIMUSHA 2: SAMURAI'S DESTINY** 2002 [PS2]
- **ONIMUSHA: WARLORDS** 2001 [PS2]

CAPCOM'S SAMURAI STORY CELEBRATES ITS FOURTH OUTING WITH A NEW HAIRDO

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House (Studio 2)
RELEASE: 2006
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Slashing demons and absorbing souls for the fourth time, with less linear gameplay and a brand new hero.

PS2 **The tyrannical Oda Nobunaga may have bitten the bullet in the third instalment of Capcom's esteemed *Onimusha* saga, but that hasn't quelled producer Keiji Inafune's samurai spirit.** *Dawn Of Dreams* takes place in 1598, some 15 years after Jean Reno left his Gallic mark on ancient Japan. The country is now under the rule of Lord Hideyoshi, and the Genma demons have vanished. But it was never going to stay like that, was it? A red star has appeared in the sky, causing a torrent of natural disasters to ravage the land. Hideyoshi is losing his mind and, yes, the Genma demons have returned. Step up Soki, the unusually blond protagonist, complete with twin swords.

Capcom is promising a change of direction for the series, and early signs point to an increased level of freedom. Not only has *Dawn Of Dreams* freed itself from the shackles of its predecessors' fixed camera angles, but players are now able to wander in and out of story progression, free to explore new territories and battle monsters independently of the narrative. By allowing for more freedom there is always the possibility of *Dawn Of Dreams* losing the focus that a linear narrative provides, but it is a sign that Capcom is willing to take a fresh look at its key franchises.

Graphically, the game pushes the the PS2 to the limit; character models and environments are depicted in vivid colour, from meticulously designed Japanese architecture, to the usual screen-filling bosses. Special mention goes to the cherry blossoms that litter the screenshots – according to Inafune they play a key part in Hideyoshi's descent into madness.

Not only that, but their inclusion is a clever nod to popular Japanese imagery – the sight of the noble samurai slicing through an opponent as blossom peacefully floats to ground has been a recurring image in Japanese cinema history, the juxtaposition of brutality and nature a fitting metaphor for the contradictory nature of the samurai – a spiritual yet cold-blooded killing machine.

Throughout his quest, Soki can join a fellow warrior to fend off the Genma hordes. This is nothing new – Jubei had his fair share of help in *Onimusha 2*. However, this time out the player will have limited control over the second character, operating in a similar manner to a squad-based shooter. Soki can order his companion to perform the usual actions – wait, follow, attack, and defend. Especially useful is the ability to combine the two fighters' powers to perform WWE tag team-style 'Ultimate moves' with devastating consequences. The inclusion of teamwork elements could add a layer of tactical depth to the combat, marking another change in direction for the series.

But can *Dawn Of Dreams* reinvigorate a mildly flagging franchise? Capcom has proved with *Resident Evil 4* that it's willing to take risks to breathe new life into its assets. If Soki and *Onimusha 4* can follow the path trodden by Leon S Kennedy and co., then fans of the series should not be let down. There's still a long way to go before release, and enough time for Inafune to realise his dream.

> "CAPCOM HOPES TO INVIGORATE ITS FLAGGING FRANCHISE WITH A GAMEPLAY OVERHAUL"

DOUBLE TEAM

New to *Onimusha 4* is the ability to control different characters and to work with an in-game partner. Early signs suggest branching storylines, with the player able to take a number of characters through their own stories, in a similar vein to the older *Resident Evil* titles. Soki has had one buddy confirmed – a mysterious female known only as Akane who possesses the power to unleash devastating special attacks through her Oni eye. The squad-style elements are sure to alter the way *Onimusha* traditionally plays, transforming its hack-and-slash combat into a more tactical affair. It's also possible to switch between the two on-screen combatants instantly, relegating the hero to 'ally' status. However, it's yet to be confirmed whether the whole game will be playable with a secondary character.



■ *Dawn Of Dreams* continues the series' tradition of stunning, sumptuous visuals.


eMag

KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER



Here's our heroine trapped inside Chilla, a large, icicle-throwing Yeti and one of the first creatures you'll collect.

The environments are looking incredibly impressive, so full marks for epic feel are due.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Rare
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Kameo's back from the dead and looking hotter than ever.

IS IT A CASE OF THIRD PLATFORM LUCKY?

Rare hasn't exactly covered itself in glory since becoming a Microsoft developer, much to the delight of the die-hard Nintendo fans who've been gleefully plastering their 'I told you so' schtick over forums, blogs and every other outlet for gaming discussion in the past three years. To make matters worse, *Kameo* is now on its third generation of console, and interest in the title has been waning rapidly as first *Conker* and now *Perfect Dark Zero* have insisted on hogging the Rare limelight.

So where does the game slot into Microsoft's strategy for Xbox 360? Those who haven't seen *Kameo*'s latest incarnation may pass it off as a cynical attempt to fluff out the launch line-up with a title that was almost ready to roll on the Xbox, but this isn't the case. *Kameo* is a totally revamped game that surpasses Rare's attempt to bring *Conker*'s single-player campaign in line with its multiplayer.

The main changes appear to have been made in the sheer scale of the adventure, as the increased processing power of the 360 has allowed Rare to turn *Kameo* from a mere fairy tale into a *Lord Of The Rings*-style epic.

Whereas the original had the capacity for less than a hundred enemies on screen at once, the new game is rumoured to be able to handle around up to 9,000. Now, instead of static scenery the grass and flowers can sway in the breeze while hundreds of insects buzz around independently, adding a sense that the game world really is alive. As the icing on the cake the Xbox 360 should virtually eliminate the need for loading, so if you spot a mountain or castle poking out of the mist miles away, it's a safe bet that you'll be able to hop onto a horse and gallop there seamlessly and in real time.

In terms of gameplay, there seems to have been very little change, apart from the obvious fact that each encounter will potentially contain many more enemies at any one time. The old transformation monsters are still here, now featuring a slight transparency that shows the player that Kameo herself is tucked away inside controlling their every move.

It may not be a total revolution in gaming as the name of the console suggests but at least Kameo has been given the chance to look the part, ready for her big date with the next generation this November.



Looking *Zelda*-esque with that horse? Let's hope the gameplay lives up to the comparison too.

"KAMEO HAS BEEN GIVEN THE CHANCE TO LOOK THE PART, READY FOR HER BIG DATE WITH THE NEXT GENERATION"

SOUL CALIBUR III

THIRD STRIKE FOR THE SOUL CALIBUR SERIES

PS2 **Gorgeous. Stunning. Beautiful. Striking.** Whatever adjective you pick, there's no denying *Soul Calibur III* is shaping up to be a feast for the eyes. Namco has been working overtime to make an already dazzling series look even more polished. Motion-blur during heavy block stun combined with particle effects and colourful explosions whenever weapons meet in a deadlock don't sound ground-breaking, but when they're ticking along at an impressive 60 frames per second in the best PlayStation2 fighting environments seen since, well, Namco's *Tekken 5*, the effect is stunning.

Unfortunately, playing the early demo seems to have confirmed our worst fears – *Soul Calibur III* might be pushing the visual boundaries as far the PlayStation2 will allow Namco to go but at the expense of gameplay progression. Mitsurugi, the lone samurai of the series, has had his move list tweaked somewhat but the kick, horizontal, vertical and guard layout is exactly the same with no new elements giving them a fresh slant. Memory tells us the feel and speed of *Soul Calibur III* are almost identical to the last game; playing through *Soul Calibur II* again to remind yourself simply muddies the distinctions rather than accentuates them, to the point where it's hard to pick out any clear differences.

The other playable character, Tira, happily picks up the slack and shows that the new faces should have meaty move lists behind them, providing a challenge for veterans. Wielding weapons known as Chakram she's a nimble fighter but Tira doesn't easily fit into the 'quick but weak' stereotype. Her moves are more methodical and deliberate than you might imagine and stringing together combos isn't a case of mashing buttons as it might be with, say, Maxi.

Conversely, although he wasn't available to play, Zasalamel is lighter on his feet than screenshots initially suggested. He needs to get in close to fight effectively but as he isn't saddled with Astaroth-like speed it doesn't look like it should be a problem. Setsuka wasn't on display at all but it bodes well for her that Tira and Zasalamel were able to raise as many eyebrows as they did by not playing as expected.

Soul Calibur III seems to be putting all its eggs in one basket at the moment by laying on single-player mode after single-player mode. Tales Of Souls is the ever-present *Soul Calibur* story mode, showing you an overhead map à la *Final Fantasy X* so you can pick your own path through the game, dictating who you fight. It's really Weapon Master mode dressed up with a branching storyline and there's still just one ending for each character. As expected, early signs are pointing towards the Create-A-Character mode being similar to that of *Virtua Fighter 4*'s AI training – you don't actually do battle yourself, you create a fighter and then teach it what to do.

Ultimately, in the absence of gameplay progression a lot rests on single-player modes to push the boundaries and justify this sequel. Tales Of Souls is half the problem answered; it remains to be seen whether Namco can add enough meat to the Create-A-Character mode to push *Soul Calibur III* towards 'must-have' status.

"THIS PUSHES THE VISUAL BOUNDARIES BUT AT THE EXPENSE OF GAMEPLAY PROGRESSION"

SHOPAHOLIC

The options to spend money will return in *Soul Calibur III*, allowing players to collect currency in the various single-player modes and then buy weapons and accessories to use. There's no official word on what to expect but, hopefully, the inclusion of a Create-A-Character mode will free up more options than usual for the cash-happy gamer, as you can buy items to hoard for yourself or for your fighter. Regardless, all signs are pointing to the usual array of artwork and cinematics for sale, which can then be viewed in the Museum mode.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Namco
RELEASE: TBA (US: 2005)
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Tira, Setsuka and Zasalamel clash with old faces Ivy, Mitsurugi and company for the third game in the *Soul Calibur* franchise.



Though she feels a bit too stiff and stocky to play rushdown, Tira still has speed and agility to pressure opponents.

Though few took the time to master her, Ivy's tweaked move set should make her more popular. Oh, and the new costume too.

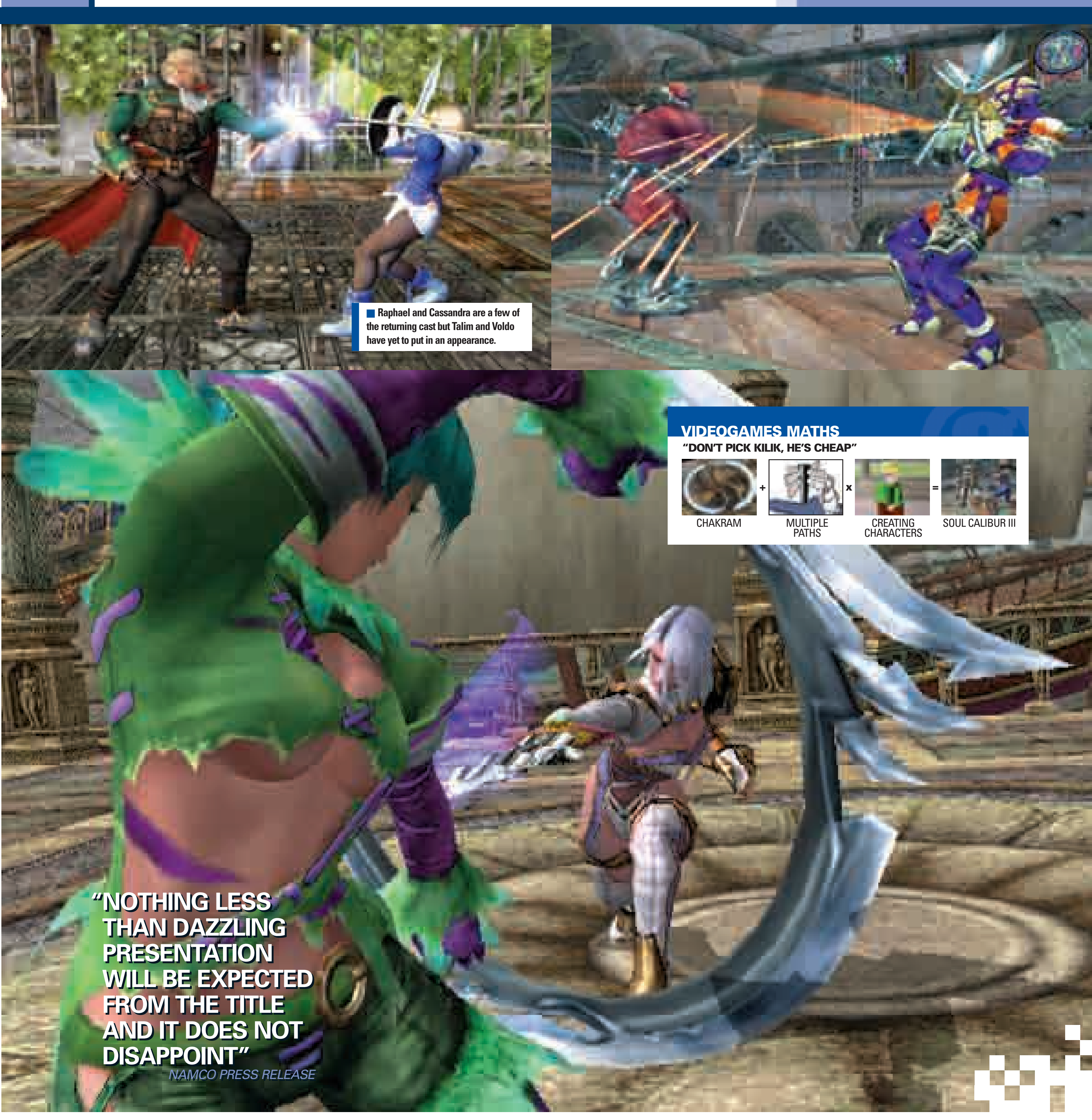
DEVELOPER PROFILE

namco

Tekken 5 and *Soul Calibur III* in the same year? If there's one company that will dominate the fighting game genre on PlayStation2 in 2005, it's Namco. Okay, so Namco was also responsible for the putrid *Death By Degrees*, but that aside…

HISTORY

- **TEKKEN 5** 2005 [PS2]
- **TEKKEN 4** 2003 [PS2]
- **SOUL CALIBUR II** 2003 [PS2]



Raphael and Cassandra are a few of the returning cast but Talim and Voldo have yet to put in an appearance.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS
"DON'T PICK KILIK, HE'S CHEAP"

CHAKRAM + MULTIPLE PATHS x CREATING CHARACTERS = SOUL CALIBUR III

"NOTHING LESS THAN DAZZLING PRESENTATION WILL BE EXPECTED FROM THE TITLE AND IT DOES NOT DISAPPOINT"
NAMCO PRESS RELEASE

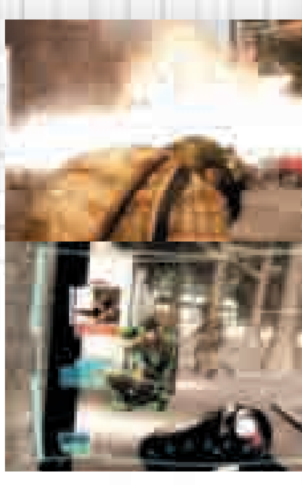
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

GHOST RECON 3

A FUTURE WAR FOR A FUTURE CONSOLE

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: In-House
Genre: Squad-Based FPS
Players: 1-TBA



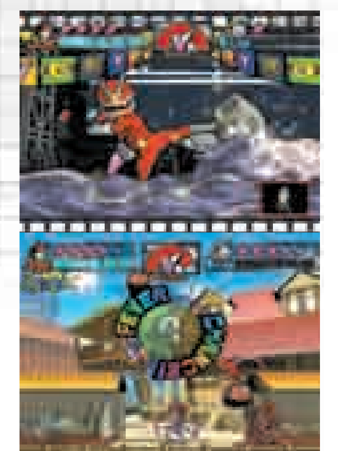
As Ubisoft pushes its popular squad-based shooter into the next generation, it does so with the promise of an unparalleled level of immersion in a high-tech, near-future war zone. The main innovation comes in the form of the 'Cross-com', a system allowing for full control of the battlefield not only by manipulating troops but also calling in air strikes and managing artillery. Set entirely in Mexico City, *Ghost Recon 3* plays host to some truly stunning locations and graphical effects, and at the moment it's difficult not to get sucked in by the sirens' call of the Xbox 360's visuals, but only some hands-on experience will reveal if the gameplay is up to the standard of the graphics.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

VIEWTIFUL JOE VFX BATTLE

IT'S ALL SO VIEWTIFUL

Format: GC, PSP
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House
Genre: Beat-'Em-Up
Players: 1-2





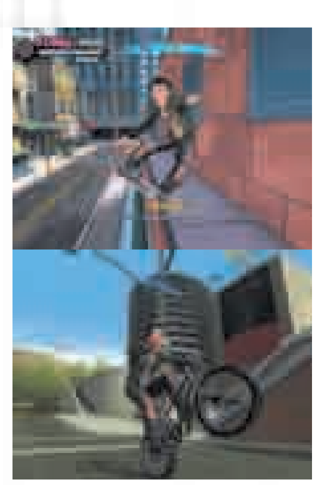
Capcom's lovingly crafted franchise bursts onto the PSP and makes a triumphant return to the GameCube. However, it arrives with a twist. There'll still be copious amounts of slow-mo scrapping but this time it will be in a one-on-one battle with another of the Viewtiful people. Bestowing full VFX capabilities on all characters, it should be interesting to see how the joyous combat of the first two *Joe* games translates to the tense battlefield of one-on-one combat. Capcom promises interactive backgrounds and additional content for the PSP version, so it will be interesting to see if this can establish a niche between the *Street Fighter* and *Soul Calibur* big boys.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

THE JESUS OF SUBURBIA

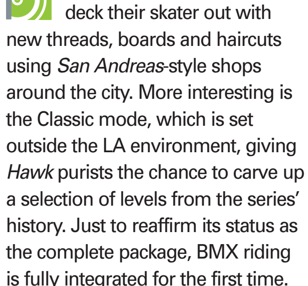
Format: Xbox, PS2, GC, DS, GBA, 360
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Neversoft
Genre: Extreme Sports
Players: 1-4 (online TBA)







The *Tony Hawk's* series has reached for the mainstream with growing determination with each title. With *American Wasteland*, Neversoft has set out to create *GTA* on a skateboard – the latest *Hawk* features a fully streaming recreation of Los Angeles, with no loading times in sight. Players can deck their skater out with new threads, boards and haircuts using *San Andreas*-style shops around the city. More interesting is the Classic mode, which is set outside the LA environment, giving *Hawk* purists the chance to carve up a selection of levels from the series' history. Just to reaffirm its status as the complete package, BMX riding is fully integrated for the first time.

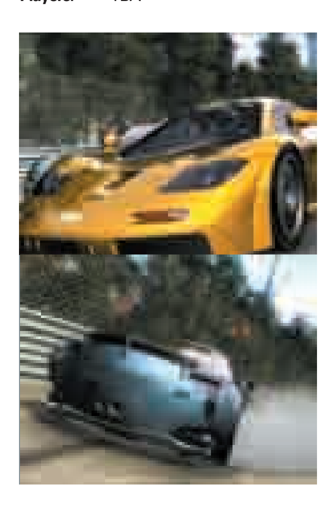


RELEASE DATE: Q4 '05

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

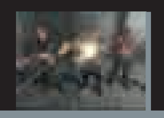
ROARING INTO THE NEXT GEN

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: US
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Bizarre Creations
Genre: Racing
Players: TBA



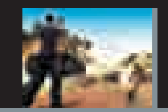
Regarded by many as the best racing series around, *Project Gotham* makes its third (fourth, if you count the Dreamcast's *MSR*) appearance, lining up on the grid for the Xbox 360 launch. Graphically, *PGR* has always set the benchmark, and the latest version looks set to blow everything else out of the water. Harnessing the raw power of the 360, *Gotham 3* shows how close the next generation will be to achieving the holy grail of the uninspired gamer – photorealism. Expect more fast-paced charges around pretty locales in the eternal quest for 'Kudos' – and with full support from 360's revamped Live service the *Project Gotham* franchise looks to maintain its position at the front of the grid.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05



DELAYED – El Matador (PC)

■ The South American-based shooter has been delayed until next year. Hopefully, this will give the developer enough time to spruce up the graphics engine in order for it to compete come 2006.



DELAYED – Total Overdose (Multi)

■ It's a Hispanic themed 'Delayed' this month, with *Total Overdose* put back until September on consoles. Those looking forward to spending summer evenings under a sombrero will have to plump for the real thing.

POSSESSION

…IS NINE TENTHS OF THE LAW

Format: PC, PS3, Xbox 360
Origin: UK
Publisher: TBA
Developer: Blitz Games
Genre: Survival Horror
Players: TBA



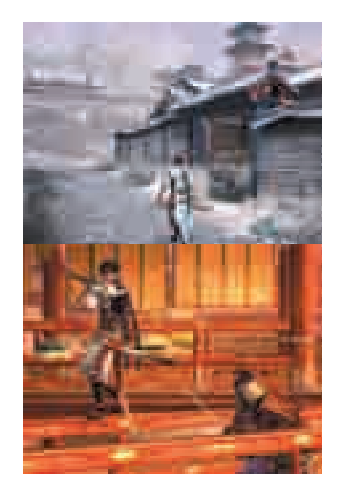
Another next-gen game, this time appearing on both Xbox 360 and PS3, *Possession* is a novel twist on typical survival horror fare: instead of running away from the zombie hordes, you're the one doing the chasing. Playing like a squad-based shooter, *Possession* allows you to control an ever-expanding, evolvable army of zombies as they wreak havoc on a city. Graphically, it's looking very impressive and more accomplished with each build, and the idea of a zombie evolving and increasing in skill, like some macabre Pokémon, is very appealing. There's a lot of development time left until the 2007 release, so hopefully *Possession* can fulfill its lofty ambitions.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '07

GENJI

SONY SELLS SAMURAI

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Game Republic
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1



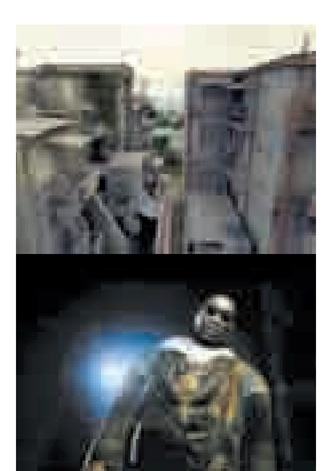
Yoshiki Okamoto, the father of *Street Fighter*, has chosen the ageing PS2 to host his new samurai epic, *Genji*. Like so many of these games, *Genji* is based on real events, namely the story of heroic warrior Genkuro Yoshitsune and his warrior monk companion, Benkei. But how does *Genji* separate itself from the established and successful *Onimusha*? On first look, they seem very similar: they share a feudal Japanese setting, both have samurai as protagonists, and both focus on the idea of slicing as many enemies as you can on the way to the next puzzle. *Genji*'s gorgeous looks are sure to get it noticed, however, echoing *House Of Flying Daggers* in its achingly beautiful art design. Could be one to watch out for.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

TRUE CRIME 2

TRUE CRIME, FALSE PROMISE?

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Luxoflux
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1





***True Crime: Streets Of L.A.*, for all its good intentions, didn't set the gaming world alight, so Activision is hoping for an upturn in fortunes with the sequel.** The city in which the game is set has yet to be confirmed, but we won't be travelling its mean streets with Nick Kang this time; he's been replaced by Marcus, a brutal street cop with a harder edge than Kang. Expect more of the free-roaming good cop/bad cop dynamic that was the core of the original. Hopefully, Activision has listened to the criticism levelled at *Streets Of L.A.* and worked on creating a more believable cityscape, injecting life and personality to expand beyond the featureless Los Angeles of the original.

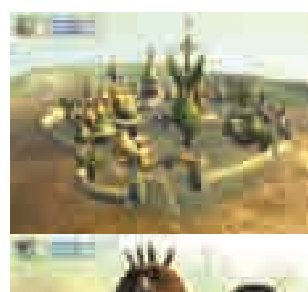


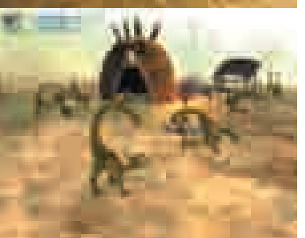
RELEASE DATE : TBA '06

SPORE

THE WRIGHT STUFF

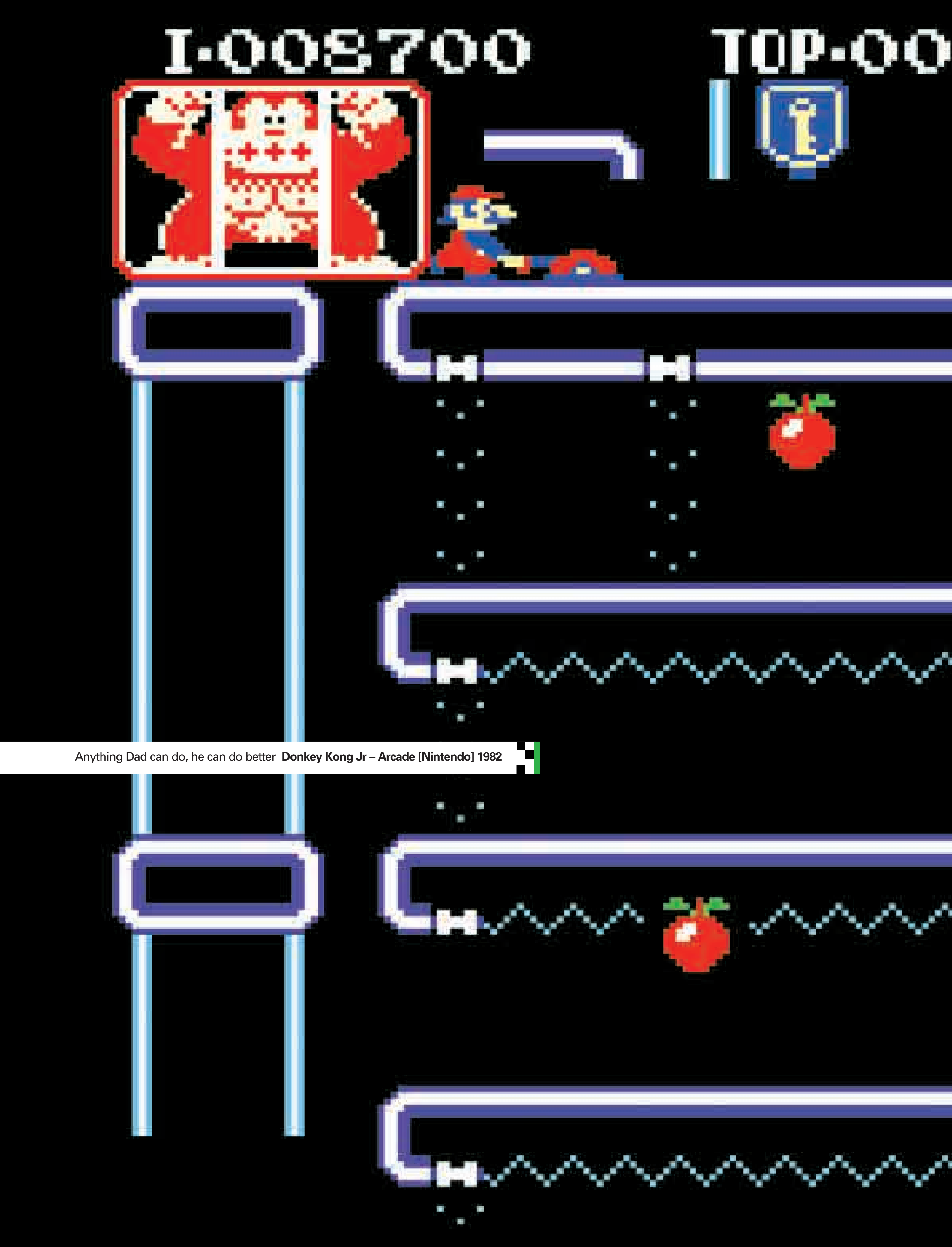
Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Ensemble Studios
Genre: Real-Time Strategy
Players: 1-TBA



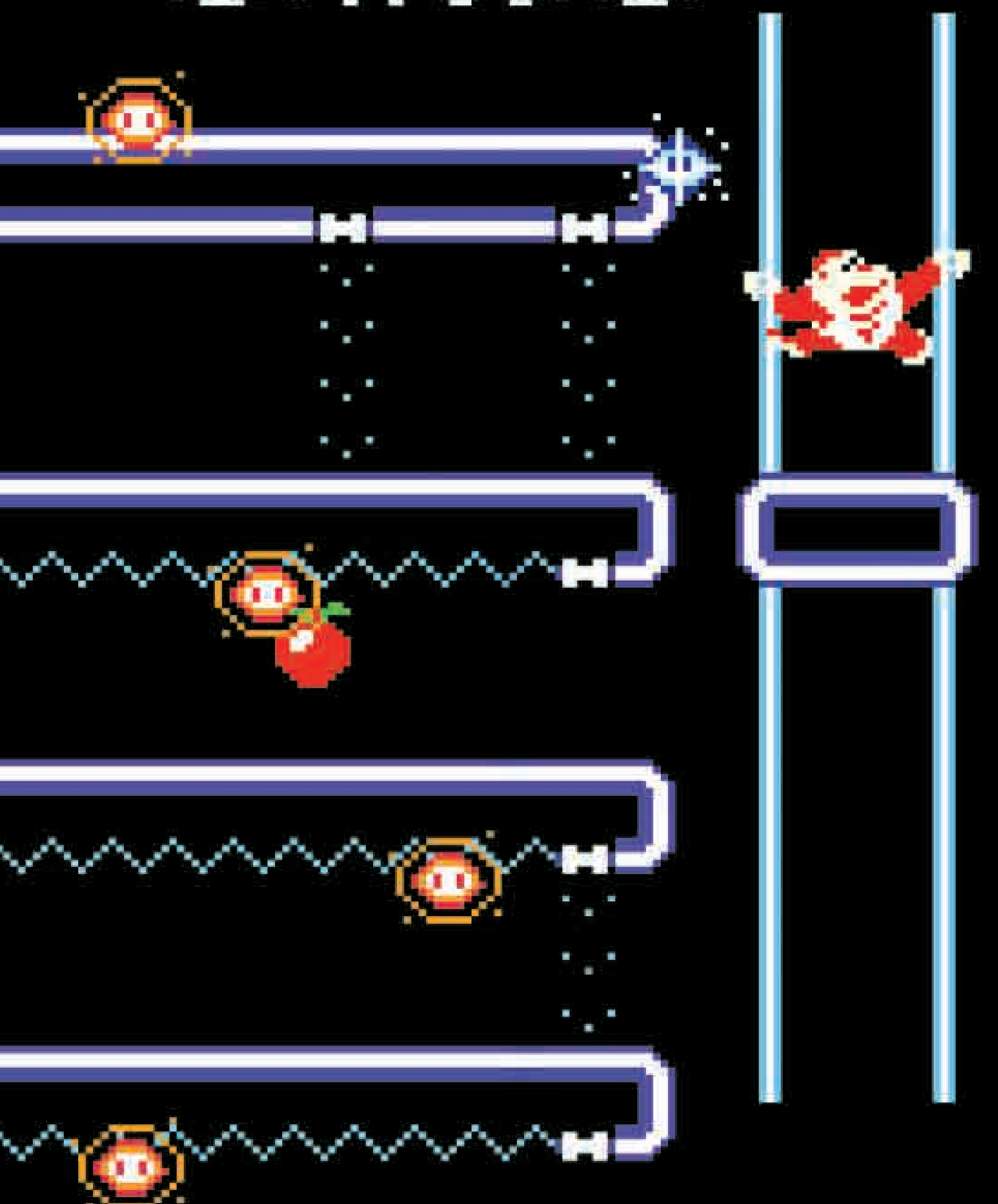


The brains behind EA's uber-franchise *The Sims*, Will Wright, has revealed his latest project, simply entitled *Spore*. Where *The Sims* allowed the player to create and manage a nuclear family, *Spore* asks you to create your own organism from scratch and encourage its evolution from microscopic amoeba to a highly intelligent being. Fascinatingly, every other organism found in the game will belong to the mind of a real person. *Spore* uploads every player's creations to a main server, then each person's copy will selectively download creatures that suit their evolving microcosm. If *Spore* can live up to its immense ambition then there's every possibility of it attaining classic status.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '06



Anything Dad can do, he can do better **Donkey Kong Jr – Arcade [Nintendo] 1982**


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LOST IN TRANSLATION



'THE GAME OF THE MOVIE!', 'THE FILM OF THE GAME!' - BOTH PHRASES PLANT FEAR IN THE HEARTS OF GAMERS AND MOVIE-LOVERS ALIKE. BUT WHY IS IT SO HARD TO MAKE A DECENT MOVIE-TO-GAME CONVERSION, AND VICE VERSA, PARTICULARLY NOW THAT THE TWO INDUSTRIES ARE GETTING CLOSER THAN EVER? GAMES™ FINDS OUT...

George Lucas has a lot to answer for. Since *Star Wars* proved a movie franchise can successfully incorporate plastic toys, books and even bubble bath, everyone's been trying to get in on the crossover act. It's all about covering your bases; why feel limited by one medium when your fans will willingly follow you into a new frontier? But just because you can, doesn't mean you necessarily should.

Videogames and movies are cut from the same highly lucrative cloth. They're both about moving images, both have varying degrees of story, and (perhaps most importantly) both make enough money to fund a couple of medium-sized countries for several decades. But it's clearly not as simple as that, with a convincing movie spawned from a console outing remaining a holy grail.

"In videogames the story is something that happens between the action," says Tom Hawker, editor of movie magazine *Hotdog*, "but in films the action fits around the story – at least you hope that's the case. Movies based on videogames are always going to struggle because they have to stretch out plots that often just involve killing lots of monsters, and unless you're George A Romero, that's a difficult thing to pull off."

By their nature, videogames are going to inspire action films, and while most action films err on the wrong side of lacklustre, there's no reason for videogame adaptations to be quite so bad as they generally turn out – half-baked stories and boring one-dimensional characters just shouldn't be the norm.

ONCE UPON A TIME...

To be fair, however good a game's plot when you're working your way through it controller in hand, it's going to take some work to extend it to the level of narrative you'd expect in even the most average Hollywood actioner. For example, *Resident Evil* had everything going for it – the perfect 'zombies on the loose' set-up, Milla Jovovich's kick-ass heroine – but in the hands of

LOST IN TRANSLATION



VIDEOGAMES KILLED THE MOVIE STAR?

A-listers like Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise might not be thinking of jacking in their movie careers yet, but there are enough Hollywood residents making a dime or two by moonlighting in videogames to suggest it's a lucrative business. Indeed, the lure of the console dollar is tempting much higher profile stars than N*SYNC star and wannabe astronaut Lance Bass, who turned up in *Kingdom Hearts* (just be thankful the rest of the band stayed away).

The *Grand Theft Auto* series is arguably king in the ensemble cast stakes, with Ray Liotta, Dennis Hopper, Burt Reynolds and Samuel L Jackson all lending their vocal cords to the franchise – the sort of talent that would make most movie directors jealous. And it's not just voices; Arnold Vosloo, the threatening slaphead mummy in, er, *The Mummy*, has lent his voice and likeness to the recent *Boiling Point*.

Hollywood is certainly starting to take notice of the games industry, so much so that this year's E3 was picketed by voice-over actors demanding a bigger share of the console loot. Whether a threatened walk-out would have had any effect is doubtful, however – do gamers really care if a character's voiced by an Oscar-winner rather than a struggling actor earning cash between waiting tables?

videogame movie 'specialist' Paul WS Anderson (well, he made *Mortal Kombat*) it was as scary as the Tweenies. Even Steven de Souza, writer of action classic *Die Hard*, found a game-to-movie conversion an impossible task, though to be fair, transferring the united nations of scrapping stereotypes that fill the *Street Fighter* universe to a film was going to be tough even before Jean-Claude Van Damme signed up.

Game plots are always going to lag behind movies because their stories don't have to be strictly defined – indeed, most of the fun comes from making your own decisions, solving your own problems and doing your own dying – but the whole point of cinema is that the director makes those choices for you. Seeing an approximation of a game play out on celluloid is like watching your mate play a game, which, as countless duff gaming TV shows have proved, is not the greatest spectator sport in the world. Besides, filmmakers are always going to be reluctant to kill off their main character – unless you're very creative in the script, cinema characters don't get three lives.

"Lead characters in games are usually hard, practically immortal superbeings," says Hawker. "That's great when you're playing a game because it puts you in a position you're unlikely to experience in real life, but in a film you want someone you can root for – you want a bit of weakness. The sort of invincible characters you see in games would usually make supporting players in movies at best."

Take *Halo*'s Master Chief. In his two Xbox outings he's proven himself one of the most iconic game characters of recent years, but it's difficult to imagine how even he could become a viable action movie hero. Indeed, *28 Days Later* and *The Beach* writer Alex Garland has his work cut out with his upcoming film adaptation of Bungie's best-seller simply because the strengths of the game incarnation – Master Chief's near-invincibility and an enigmatic quality that has his face hidden behind a mask for the duration of the games – aren't the sort of things we usually look for in a film lead. The possible solutions? Open the helmet (and create a massive controversy as fanboys criticise the filmmakers' choice of actor) or have the Chief play second fiddle to some other marine – hardly satisfactory if you want to be faithful to your source material, though it does open the door for a potential Darth Vader-style prequel.

That said, adhering too closely to their videogame inspiration is where many movie spin-offs have fallen down. In the early Nineties,

> "THE SORT OF INVINCIBLE, PRACTICALLY IMMORTAL CHARACTERS YOU SEE IN GAMES WOULD USUALLY MAKE SUPPORTING PLAYERS IN MOVIES AT BEST"

The game of *Chronicles Of Riddick* was far superior to the film.



Face it – everyone wants to be in *Star Wars*, don't they?

games and live action were two completely different worlds, and a literal translation was never going to be possible – a Brooklyn plumber bouncing around eating mushrooms was never going to look convincing in the real world, particularly when he was played by Bob Hoskins. But now, with games looking increasingly lifelike and cinematic, there's clearly a temptation to 'borrow' their content wholesale and keep the look and feel of the game in the movie.

The movie version of *Doom* (starring The Rock and due out in October) will take this concept to an extreme by featuring an sequence viewed in the first-person in a knowing wink to the game. "We have an extended sequence that goes into a POV of the John [Grimm] character," says the movie's producer, John Wells. "There's a lengthy part of the third act where you will be inside of his head during the action, so we're really anxious to see how that turns out." Whether this will work as a cinematic device is a moot point; first-person's great when you're controlling the character, but handled incorrectly it has the potential to leave audiences feeling bored and nauseous.

LICENCE TO PRINT MONEY

It's not just filmmakers who have trouble translating from one medium to another. Movie-licensed games are big business – they find a natural audience with people who want to live the film rather than just watch it – but they rarely receive review scores to match their massive popularity. An exception was last year's *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*, a spin-off from unexpected sci-fi movie hit *Pitch Black* that managed to surpass overblown big-screen sequel *The Chronicles Of Riddick* both in terms of action and arguably even plot – quite a feat for a computer game.

Jens Matthies, art director at Starbreeze, the developer that created the game, reckons that the team's long, 18-month lead time played a big part in the title's success. "*The Chronicles Of Riddick* wasn't rushed in the same way that these games usually are," he says. "In our case they thought the character [Vin Diesel's Riddick] was so strong that they greenlit the game before they greenlit the movie. We took a long look at the *Pitch Black* movie and had meetings to try to identify what was key about the character and what was key about the universe. That allowed us to make our own vision of the game before we had a movie to mimic."

Deciding how closely to adhere to the source film is a dilemma that faces every developer that takes on a movie licence; pay too little attention to the original movie and you risk alienating the fans who want to be Luke Skywalker/Neo/Spider-Man (delete as appropriate). Pay too much, however, and you're going to have an overly talky, action-light game with clunky, contrived level progression – films don't generally follow the 'increasingly bigger baddie' ethos that often makes videogames tick.

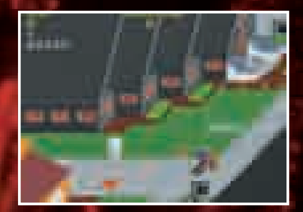
"It's interactive, and you want the player to experience the game in their own way, to create their own story,"

NOT COMING TO A CINEMA NEAR YOU...

THE GAMES THAT ARE UNLIKELY TO APPEAR AS FILMS, NO MATTER HOW DESPERATE THE MOVIE EXECS GET

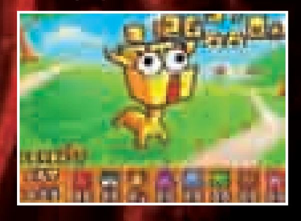
PAPERBOY

From a game to a bloody tale of revenge. Fed up of dealing with bad roads and rude customers, Paper Boy goes postal, delivering papers, magazines… and death.



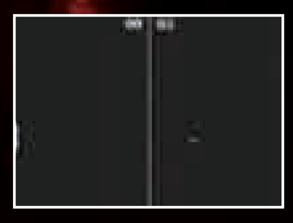
ZOO KEEPER

Jim Carrey is the bumbling zoo keeper who causes a flood and has to save three of every animal, then four, then five… Danny DeVito plays his irate boss.



PONG

A real underdog story as the talented left-hand bat overcomes adversity to get to the State Championships, where it must face the ruthless right-hand bat.



TETRIS

The sky is falling… in terrifying geometric clusters. Reel at this vision of a future where one man must save his family as a T-shape hurtles towards his home.





"IT'S A LOW-STATUS THING TO DO A VIDEOGAME MOVIE – PERHAPS UNFAIRLY. THERE ARE SOME OUTSTANDING GAMES THAT WOULD MAKE GREAT MOVIES"

explains Glen Schofield, executive producer of Electronic Arts' upcoming adaptation of James Bond classic *From Russia With Love*. "We want to tell the story of the movie, but we also want it to be personalised a bit for each player. *From Russia With Love* is a great, classic film and we are determined to stick to the storyline and show the big moments from it. With that said, though, we plan on making a director's cut, meaning we will be adding new locations, some new characters and even a surprise ending."

All of which sounds incredibly cinematic; indeed, it was inevitable that games would be able to take on more movie characteristics as the quality of graphics gets closer to that of film. Now many movie production techniques have been taken on by games, with game characters' movements made real by motion-capturing real actors, and many film industry job titles (like lighters, stunt people and camera operators) have made the transition to the newer medium. Some actors also manage to supplement their day jobs by doing voice work on games, and many titles now have cast lists to rival a medium-sized Hollywood outing.

ONE AND THE SAME

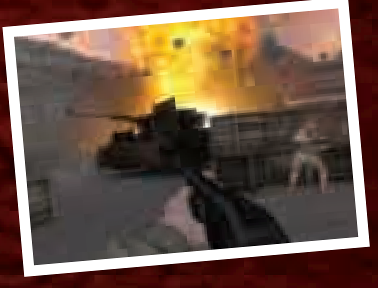
And it's not all one-way traffic – hardly surprising given that large sections of summer event movies are now created inside a computer – with videogames technology a useful tool in helping filmmakers visualise scenes before they film them, essentially creating a 3D storyboard. That said, Matthies admits that it's games developers who have the catching up to do: "When it comes to conveying emotions in a medium that you're not actually participating in, I don't think [filmmakers] have really got much to learn from computer games. It's really much more the other way round."

But maybe a time when videogames and films can interchange at will and sit comfortably side by side isn't that far away. As Schofield puts it, "We are starting to blur the line between movies and games. Just wait until the next generation of hardware." BAFTA already dishes out awards for the best games; maybe, as games become even more theatrical, Oscar will follow suit. And is it all that outlandish to start talking about games superstars? Videogames and videogame movies may not be particularly fashionable among the Hollywood glitterati now, but in the future, who knows?

"Certainly it's a low-status thing to do a videogame movie," says Matthies. "Few people are willing to lower themselves to that level, in some ways I think very unfairly

Why play *Street Fighter* when you can watch Van Damme? Um…

■ *Resident Evil* works better when you can shoot the undead yourself.



■ *Medal Of Honor: European Assault* boasts a John Milius script. Impressive coup.

because there are games that are really outstanding and would make really good movies. But I think that's a stigma that also has applied to comic books, and certainly now very talented people are doing movies on comic books, so I think at some point that will probably happen to videogames as well. But we're not quite there yet."

The fact that *Apocalypse Now* writer John Milius has scripted the latest *Medal Of Honor* game, *European Assault*, may be an early sign that the Hollywood establishment is taking its interactive cousins more seriously – perhaps it has no choice, with games now more lucrative than movies. And with a sequel to Disney's pioneering *Tron* having appeared only in game form, and *Enter The Matrix* bridging (albeit poorly) the gap between the original film and *The Matrix Reloaded* in a way a comic might have done in the past, perhaps comic books do indeed hold the clues to the future of computer games movies.

"I think the people who learned comic books and invested their emotions in them are now the people making movies," adds Matthies. "The kids today that play videogames will bring these emotions with them when they played these games, and when the time comes for them to direct feature films they may retain the love for those games and make great movies." Let's hope they hurry up. The wait has already been more than long enough.

GAME FOR A LAUGH

IT MUST HAVE SEEMED LIKE A MONEY-MAKING WHEEZE AT THE TIME, BUT WHEN THE CAMERAS STOPPED ROLLING WAS IT REALLY SUCH A GOOD IDEA TO MAKE THESE GAME-TO-FILM MOVIES?

5 SUPER MARIO BROS (1993)



■ No moustaches, no mushrooms, no pipes in sight – hopeless.

Nintendo's iconic Italian plumber is played by Londoner Bob Hoskins, but that's not the weirdest thing about this leaden adaptation; it's got something to do with dinosaurs and evil Dennis Hopper, but the only magic mushrooms were apparently those ingested by the screenwriters.

4 STREET FIGHTER (1994)



■ And to think this is the last film Raul Julia made before he died…

Die Hard writer Steven de Souza tried to work out a way of getting Ken, Ryu, Chun Li and co into one coherent film – and failed. By the time the credits roll the special moves are all present and correct, but the movie still manages to have less plot than a Friday night pub brawl.

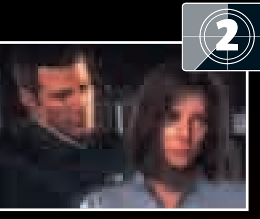
3 LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER (2001)



■ Girl? Check. Gun? Check. Motorbike? Check. Formulaic? Whaddya mean?

Angelina Jolie certainly looks and sounds the part as aristo-adventurer Lara Croft, but the Oscar-winning actress isn't enough to save this sub-*Indiana Jones* actioner from mediocrity. Deserves to be buried with the antiquities Lara is so fond of uncovering.

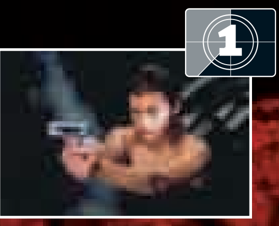
2 FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS WITHIN (2001)



■ Nice to see an Affleck lookalike. More personality than the real one, for sure.

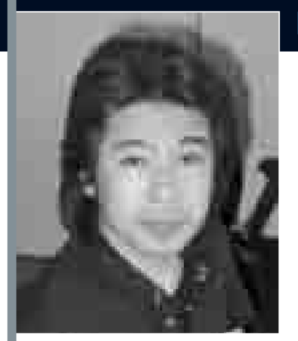
It's the first CG movie to attempt photoreal people, but *Final Fantasy*'s artificial bods are still like Thunderbirds without the strings. That said, the Phantoms look fantastic and the film's structure is the closest yet to a game. Whether that's a good thing, of course, is debatable

1 RESIDENT EVIL (2002)



■ Girl? Check. Gun? Check. Motorbike? Hey, someone forgot the motorbike…

Having already tried his hand with *Mortal Kombat*, Paul WS Anderson turned this PSone classic into one of the least scary zombie films ever. The Raccoon City survivors are so bland that you will the 'infected' to have a good meal, but worse was to come with laughable sequel *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*.



The Players

WITH A RAFT OF QUALITY TITLES EMERGING FROM ITS STUDIOS RECENTLY, WE DOUBT THAT ANYONE COULD DENY THAT CAPCOM HASN'T PUT A FOOT WRONG FOR A WHILE. WELL, ANYONE EXCEPT PRODUCER TATSUYA MINAMI…

TATSUYA MINAMI

CAPCOM JAPAN

There have been many publishers that have brought us high-quality titles over the last few years. Even some of the smaller companies have been able to prove that every dog has his day, turning out at least one exceptional title in recent memory. But to continually produce original and challenging titles without missing a beat? Now that's amazing.

There's one company that seems to be managing it, though – Capcom. After joining the firm back in 1987 and working on 2D games for a year before a swift rise to the rank of producer, Tatsuya Minami must be the perfect person to let us know just how the company has managed to become the Midas of the videogames industry…

"Are you sure about that?" Minami asks with a laugh. Yes, we are. Very sure. As modest as Minami may be, nearly everything the company has worked on recently qualifies as a 'must-have' game, and we're not going to let him suggest otherwise. So what's the secret of his success? "Well, first of all Capcom has about 700 staff which is pretty vast when compared to most of the other Japanese publishers," he admits. "And all the others are based in Tokyo, whereas Capcom is based in Osaka. It may not sound much, but this makes a lot of difference. Things are very different there – not as populated. There is very little noise from outside as it's a much smaller town. This means that we can just shut out all the noise and we can get on with our jobs."

It's not the answer we were expecting. An epic tale of arduous activity and a lengthy description of the months of hard work and dedication that's been fed into every title would have seemed a little more appropriate. But if Minami chooses to attribute Capcom's success to the lack of noise pollution in Osaka then that's fine with us. But surely there's more to it than that? "Also, I think that it's because Capcom isn't a marketing-led company," Minami continues. "Things are done from a creative point of view as it's a creative group of people leading the company. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail, but with these creative gamers actually playing the games and making the decisions our titles tend to turn out more challenging than most."

'Challenging' is certainly one of the words that springs to mind when attempting to describe many of the company's recent games. After just about recovering from the toughness of the third *Devil May Cry* instalment, we've been struck by the difficulty of *killer7* – a title that's likely to draw mixed opinions largely due to this difficulty level and its stylised graphics. "Personally, I love this game," Minami reveals. "It's brand new and something totally different. You wouldn't think that any other company could deal with it. I don't know whether it will sell or not, but it was certainly a challenge to create and it definitely has its place."

killer7 was actually a bold move for Capcom. Games such as *Viewtiful Joe 2*, *Resident Evil 4* and *Devil May Cry 3* prove that the company could continue its winning streak solely by building upon its existing franchises. "There's a trend in the games industry – it's a global trend," Minami says. "Franchises are much safer to produce. It's obvious really. But within the industry – regardless of whether it's a tactic that's likely to succeed or not – companies have to try out some original ideas or they soon end up not knowing where to go. You just have to take these risks."

These risks have certainly been coming thick and fast. From recent titles such as *killer7* and the online *Monster Hunter* through to *Viewtiful Joe*'s upcoming DS debut and GameCube beat-'em-up *VFX Battle*, there's a lot to be proud of, but what's been Minami's high point at Capcom?

"I loved *Resident Evil 4*. Although I dealt with *Resident Evil Zero* as well, that was ultimately just not satisfactory for me. When compared to the other titles in the series, *Resident Evil 4* just turned out better. We started out with just another zombie game and we managed to evolve it to a point where it was something completely different. So many ideas were incorporated and so many new challenges, ideas and concepts were implemented – it really was just great. If we can get things that right again, I'll be happy."

Given Capcom's current hit rate, we reckon Minami will be smiling for a while… 

killer7 is reviewed on page 120 and is out on 15 July on PlayStation2 and GameCube



"THE MOST DIFFICULT THING TO PREDICT IS WHETHER THE PLAYER CAN ACTUALLY PLAY"
TATSUYA MINAMI

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, games™ VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, WE'RE SAN FRANCISCO BOUND TO MEET FLAGSHIP

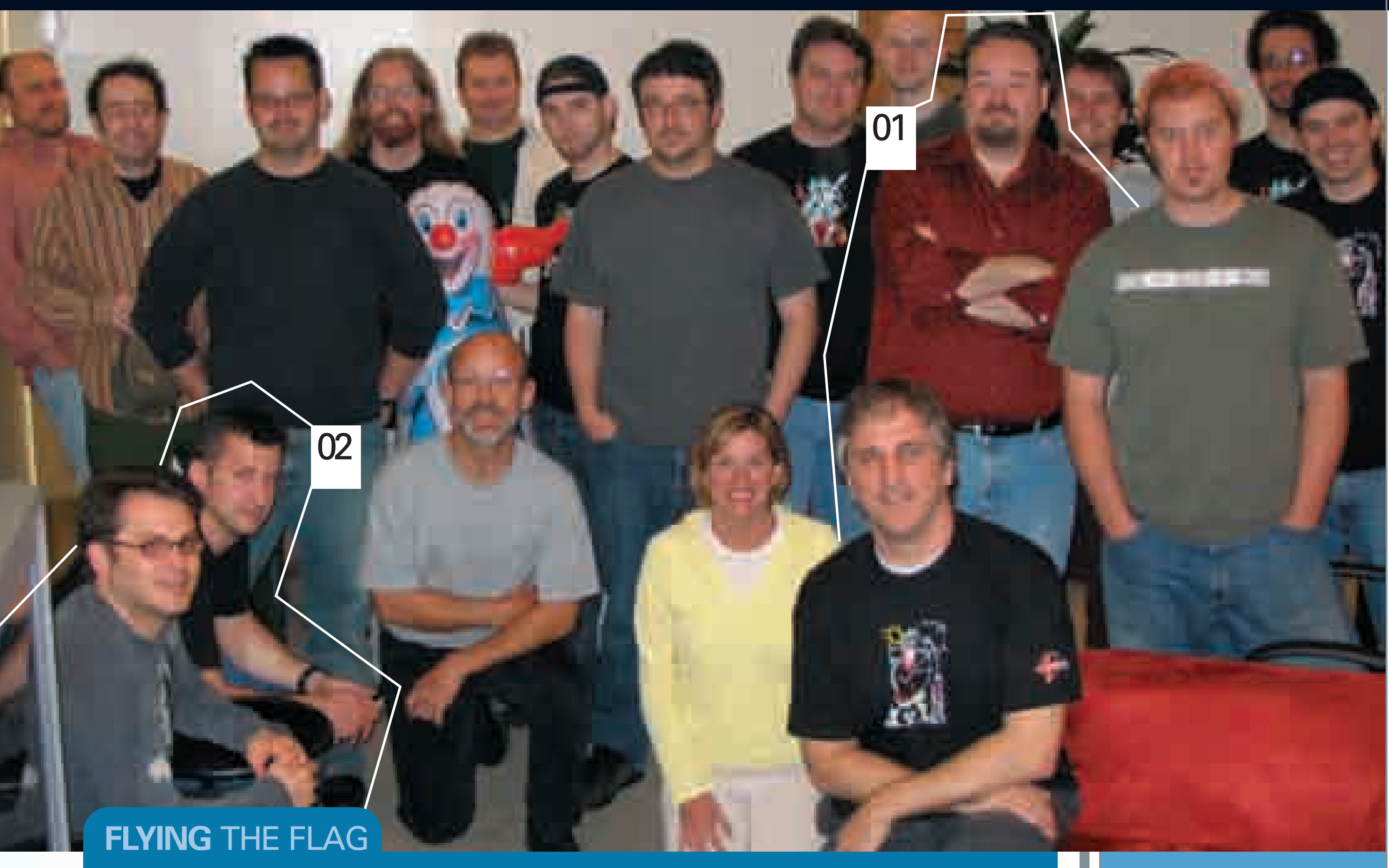
SET UP BY KEY MEMBERS OF BLIZZARD NORTH, **FLAGSHIP STUDIOS** IS HERE TO TRUMPET ITS INDEPENDENCE WITH **HIGH-OCTANE FPS HELLGATE: LONDON.** GAMES™ TRAVELLED DOWN TO ICONIC SAN FRANCISCO TO SEE HOW A **NEW DEVELOPER ESTABLISHES ITSELF** IN A CUT-THROAT INDUSTRY…



FLAGSHIP STUDIOS

Making a name for yourself isn't easy in the fast-paced development community, so why break away from a successful studio and risk everything? It's comforting to see that developers who place their artistic value higher than their bank balance still exist…

Founded by Bill Roper, Dave Brevik and Max and Erich Schaefer – all former Blizzard North employees responsible for the likes of *Diablo* and *StarCraft* – Flagship Studios was born out of a desire for creative and business control, though this wasn't always the intention. "Our goal was never to leave Blizzard," explains CEO Bill Roper. "At the time, there were a lot of rumours going around about the sale of the Vivendi Universal Games group. We wanted to be able to interact directly with the people making the key decisions that could



FLYING THE FLAG

1 BILL ROPER, CEO
IN A NUTSHELL: Ex-vice president at Blizzard North and co-founder of Flagship, Bill played a key role in the world design for the *WarCraft*, *StarCraft* and *Diablo* series.

2 PHIL SHENK, ART DIRECTOR
IN A NUTSHELL: Another ex-Blizzard North employee, Phil's work on the *Diablo* franchise was instrumental in setting the look and tone of the characters and monsters in the games.

ERICH SCHAEFER, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER (NOT SHOWN)
IN A NUTSHELL: Co-founding Blizzard North with his brother Max and Bill Roper, Erich was project lead, design lead and art director on *Diablo* and *Diablo 2*.

drastically affect our lives and workplace. In order to show how serious we were about having a higher level of involvement, we felt we needed to submit resignations. Vivendi made the decision to accept them as opposed to speaking with us." And so Flagship was created.

Independence seems to be a dying commodity in the games industry, so Flagship's founders have made a bold move by setting up on their own. Rather than being worried about competing with the big boys, however, they're rather enjoying it. "To put it simply, being an independent company feels great," says Roper. "We can address needs as they come up in the way we feel best for the game and for our team, and everyone in the company has a true sense of ownership in what we're creating." However, Roper acknowledges that it hasn't all been plain sailing. "It can be difficult at times – like the first several months of the company when we self-funded development and didn't take salaries." The sacrifices made in order to maintain a company's independence can be severe, but it would seem Flagship considers its creative freedom more important than financial gain. High principles indeed in a big-bucks industry.

> **"I AM PERSONALLY SCEPTICAL THAT TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES WILL DO MUCH TO IMPROVE GAMEPLAY QUALITY"**
> ERICH SCHAEFER, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER

But how does a new company break in to the market? Not by releasing another FPS, surely? "We really aren't concerned about being lost in the shuffle of the crowded FPS market, because we believe our game will feel and play completely differently," says chief creative officer Erich Schaefer of Flagship's debut title, the ambitious *Hellgate: London*. "First and foremost, *Hellgate: London* is a role-playing game. Although it looks like an FPS on the surface, success in the game is not based on the 'twitch skills' of the player." In fact, the first-person element has been included in order to expand the game's creative horizons rather than to cash in on any trends. "The reason we're utilising the first-person perspective is that it allows us to create a wholly immersive experience," says Roper. "We can create demons that literally stand five storeys tall, or are so

NO 'I' IN TEAM

Flagship Studios has assembled a talented and experienced group of developers, many of whom have worked together for nearly a decade. Undoubtedly, this core unit, accountable for some of the most successful PC games of the Nineties, has a head start on other studios in the same position. Time usually used for team bonding and familiarisation was not wasted at Flagship; the team knew exactly what they needed from each other, exactly how to communicate and through which channels to do it, and, vitally, they knew exactly what game they wanted to make. This shows when watching *Hellgate: London* in action. A fractured team composed of players from different corners of the industry would struggle to cohere to achieve a single-minded goal in the way Flagship has.

SNOWSTORM

Flagship is a new studio with only one IP, but most of its developers came from Blizzard North, creator of some mighty fine action RPGs…

DIABLO [PC,1996]

The original isometric, randomly generated dungeon crawl. Nearly a decade old, its influence can still be seen in the likes of *Baldur's Gate*. *Diablo* gained massive critical and commercial success upon release and became Blizzard's key franchise as it moved toward the millennium.



STARCRAFT [PC,1998]

Real-time strategy that pioneered the concept of dramatically different races within a game, all of which are playable. Operating on a grander scale than the likes of *Command & Conquer*, *StarCraft* is still regarded by many as the pinnacle of RTS gaming in the Nineties.



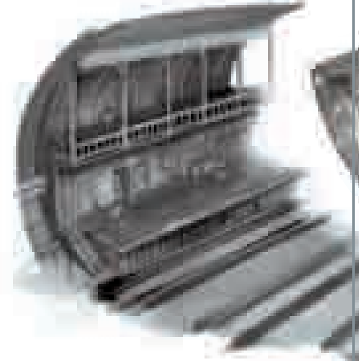
HELLGATE: LONDON [PC, 2005]

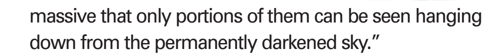
Flagship's first IP on its own, *Hellgate* is best described as *Diablo* in the first person. Determined not to have its creation branded a shooter, Flagship is clear that the game remains true to *Diablo*'s RPG roots. *Hellgate: London* will be out later this year.





The Flagship team are pretty progressive, using computers *and* paper in their office.



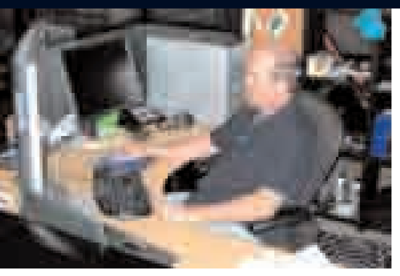
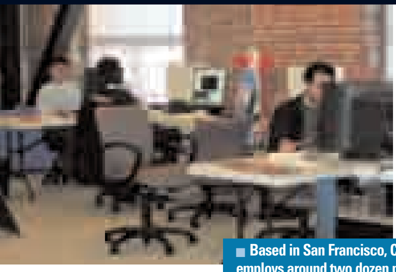


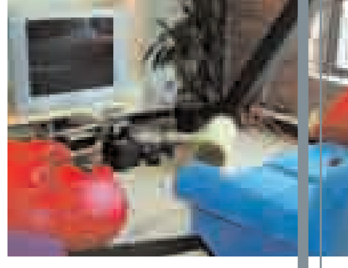
RANDOM FURY

***Diablo* started the craze of randomly generated dungeons that offer the gamer a unique experience with every play. This was reasonably simple, as dungeons are fairly generic in their assumed appearance and layout, so a random version of an uncomplicated ideology was entirely feasible. What Flagship is doing with *Hellgate*, however, is randomising one of the most famous cities on the globe – London. By using landmarks familiar to both Londoners and tourists alike, the result is a fascinating simulacrum of our capital's points of interest, interlinked by pathways and roads that change depending on who's playing.**

massive that only portions of them can be seen hanging down from the permanently darkened sky."

Flagship has the utmost confidence in its product – which is crucial considering the fate of the company could rest on the game's success. But the studio is breezing into the development community with an air of comfort, its managers safe in the knowledge that they have a work force that can be relied upon implicitly. Having a core development team that has been working together for such a long time gives Flagship an advantage many fledgling developers lack. "I believe that the fact we know each other so well and respect each other so much allows us to be critical and objective," Erich Schaefer explains. BIll Roper agrees: "The fact that we have a strong core team that has been working together upwards of a decade in some cases means that we know exactly what to expect from each other and how to interact to make the best game possible."



■ Based in San Francisco, California, Flagship Studios employs around two dozen people, all of whom have brought considerable industry experience with them.




So what about the future? With *Hellgate* nearing completion, and the next generation rapidly approaching, what can we expect from Flagship? Erich Schaefer doesn't like to get ahead of himself. "Our ambitions don't get a lot bigger than developing one single great game at a time," he says, before offering a tantalising morsel of what may be to come. "As far as the types of games we might make in the future, all I can surmise is that it will be an original idea, probably not completely obvious from looking at our previous titles." Roper also wants to avoid too much speculation, preferring to remain focused on *Hellgate*. "We think that our plans for Flagship Studios and *Hellgate: London* are going to excite a lot of people," he says. "The stories that are possible within the *Hellgate* setting are numerous and would translate well to any media, from novels to comics to television or film. Everyone here is a geeky gamer at heart, so we'd love to see the franchise move into other realms as well, like action figures, collectables or even other styles of paper-and-pencil or board games derived from the world we're creating."

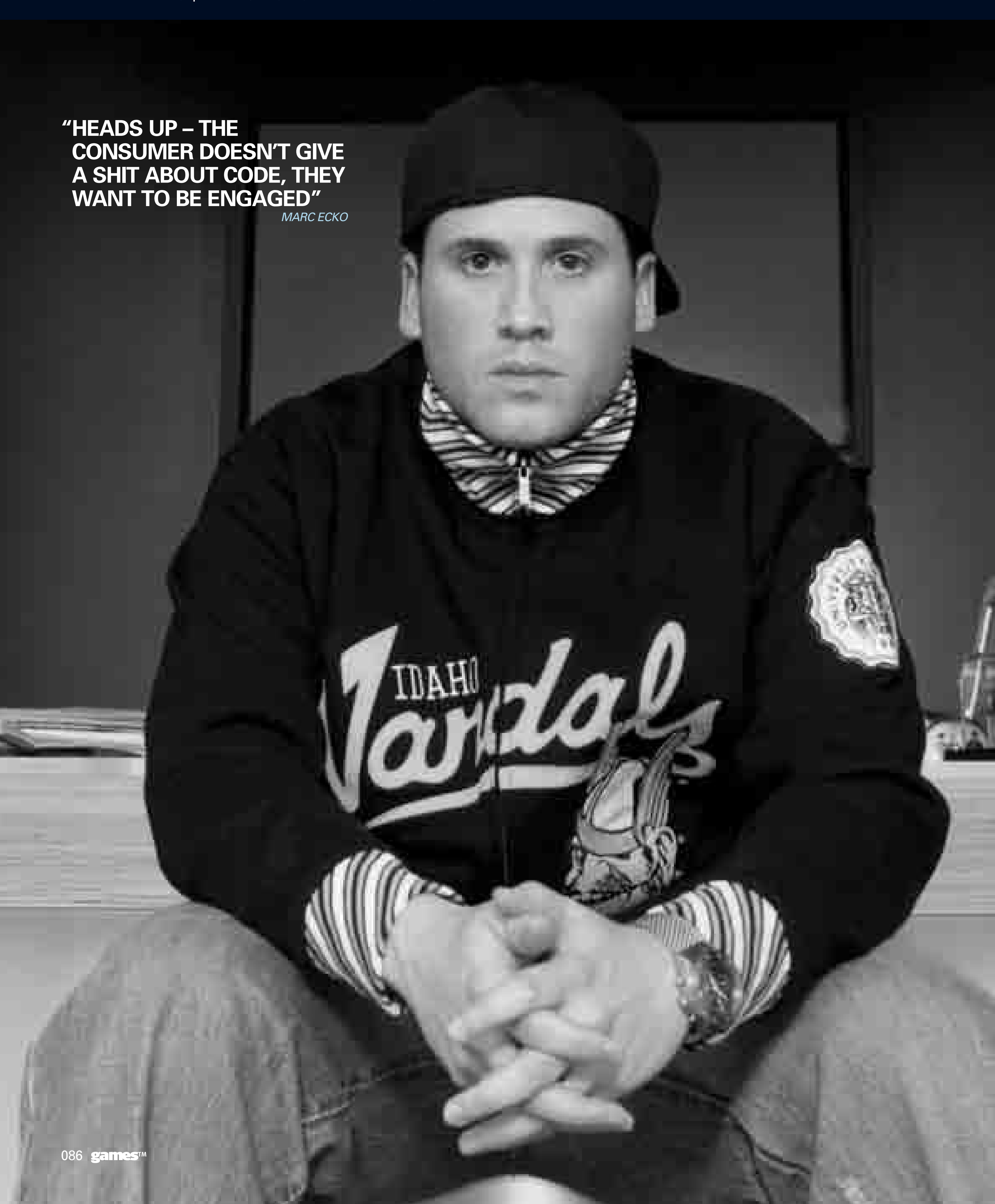
The team at Flagship is interested by the next-gen consoles, but insists that the power of the new machines should be used wisely. "I am sceptical that technology advances will do much to improve gameplay quality, as opposed to graphic quality," says Schaefer. "I think we have more technology than we need to do some pretty incredible things. Hell, I can be satisfied with Game Boy technology." Despite Schaefer's comments, Roper wants to keep the studio working within its area of expertise – the PC. "One of the biggest advantages of working on the PC is also one of the biggest challenges," he says. "When a new console is released, it basically represents a snapshot of what the best PC has to offer. The PC, however, is constantly growing over time, so developing a game for it means you have a moving target in terms of what your platform can do, how many people have what level of technology and so on." Roper is equally enthusiastic about the online revolution: "Gaming took a huge leap forward when developers found ways to use the internet to bring more players together and incorporate a global community into their design," he says. "One of the reasons that MMORPGs have exploded over the past few years is that developers are finding the best ways to utilise the technology to bring communities together." It's clear Flagship has its finger on the pulse when it comes to the gaming climate.

So with a potentially great game nearing completion and an obvious drive for success, the future looks bright for Flagship, and its head honchos are looking forward to finding out what everyone thinks of their product. "We love to get input from players – I know we can't please everybody, but we're eager to create a novel and enjoyable gameplay experience, and the way to do that is by watching and learning from our potential customers," says Schaefer. If the feedback for *Hellgate: London* is as positive as we think it may be, it looks like Flagship should be in the market for a while yet.

"TO PUT IT SIMPLY, BEING AN INDEPENDENT COMPANY FEELS GREAT"
BILL ROPER, CEO

HELL ON EARTH

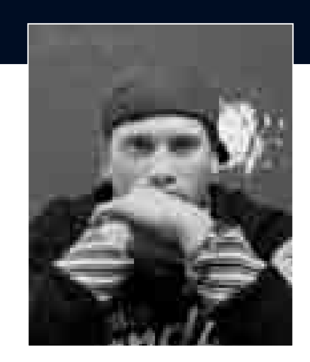
Hellgate: London **fuses various popular gaming staples – it's futuristic yet medieval, with anachronistic weaponry; it's in a familiar setting that's also pure fantasy; and, of course, it's got some bloody great slavering monsters…**



"HEADS UP – THE CONSUMER DOESN'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT CODE, THEY WANT TO BE ENGAGED"

MARC ECKO





The Players

ALTHOUGH A MAN KNOWN FOR HIS CLOTHING SEEMS AN ODD CHOICE TO AID IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GAME, MARC ECKO COULD PROBABLY TURN HIS HAND TO ANYTHING. GAMES™ FINDS OUT WHAT HE'S PLAYING AT

MARC ECKO

MARC ECKO ENTERPRISES

It's fair to say that before the recent unveiling of Atari's forthcoming title *Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure* some of us hadn't even heard of Marc Ecko. This is largely due to the fact that our modest wage forces our eyes to skim over any items of clothing that are priced higher than £9.99. But now, since receiving the opportunity to talk to Ecko about his entrance into the videogame industry, we're finding it difficult to walk down the street without spotting a rhino-emblazoned tracksuit.

"News flash – kids want cool shit," Ecko informs us. "If they don't dig what I'm selling – whether it's a sweatshirt, magazine or a videogame – they aren't biting. You've got only so much cash in your pocket to spend on clothing, entertainment and food, and are going to maximise every last cent of it. If it's not mine, it's somebody else's product so I've got to make sure that when I put my name on a new project like *Getting Up*, it's done right."

This aggressive attitude towards business is likely to be responsible for the man's success in the various ventures he's put his name to. With no less than six apparel brands to his name (including Ecko Unlimited, Marc Ecko 'Cut & Sew' and Eckored) and his more recent interest in the entertainment industry, Ecko certainly likes to dig his fingers into different pies, but after dealing in fashion for so long how does the videogames industry compare? "Too many people in this industry are afraid to take a risk," he says. "They'd rather watch the consumer pass them by than evolve to their culture. Stop making games for gamers and consider, just for a moment, making something that the general consumer really cares about. Advertising and marketing overload will not mask poor product."

Unfortunately, a look at the charts over recent months actually proves that – in some cases – slapping a game on the side of every bus and phone box is quite an effective way of grabbing yourself a number-one slot. However, Ecko's view is refreshing and shows promise for any title he chooses to work with. "The consumer wants to be entertained," he continues. "And not on their time – on ours. The problem with success in any industry – fashion or gaming – is complacency. It's rampant in gaming, with publishers and developers content with status quo, churning out the next 'me too' product and refusing to adapt to the needs of the consumer. Heads up – the consumer doesn't give a shit about code, they want to be engaged. And if your game isn't delivering, they'll check out a new DVD, steal music, or some other activity that ain't going to pay your bills."

A 'me too' product is certainly not on the cards for Ecko, with *Getting Up* being largely about contemporary graffiti culture. It's a subject that's never really been touched upon in gaming before; with the lack of passion about the subject in many territories, that's possibly with good reason. What is Ecko hoping to achieve with this bold move? "At its heart, this game is a long due tribute to the richness of graffiti and the artists that are out there spreading this global art movement," he tells us. "I want the player to walk away with a deeper understanding of the power of this medium, the athleticism of a graf writer and the rich skill sets they possess. I want them to look at a tag and instead of seeing 'filth', recognise it as a medium that has in effect shaped popular culture over the last 20 years."

With his work with development team The Collective nearly complete, Ecko's managed to get a good taste of what this industry has to offer – so where does he go from here? Will we be seeing more games from him or is it time to head back to the hoodies? "*Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure* is just the beginning," Ecko says confidently. "We're already putting together a script for the second chapter and are exploring film opportunities, as well as game properties completely unrelated to *Getting Up*, so stay tuned. I caught the bug, and I am not going away so easily. If you are reading this and you dream of making games, know that there is hope. If they tell you no, come see me…"

Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure is out in autumn 2005 on PlayStation2 and was previewed in issue 32.

REVIEWS





In two minds about going on a killing spree? Harman Smith's in seven… Find out here whether style wins out over substance in Capcom's latest.
killer7 120

■ Enemy artillery can be dangerous, but not if the people inside don't spot you – keep low and then blow them away when they're not looking.





■ Single-player games are better now, although your team-mates do have a habit of bunching up and holding position unless you tell them otherwise.



BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

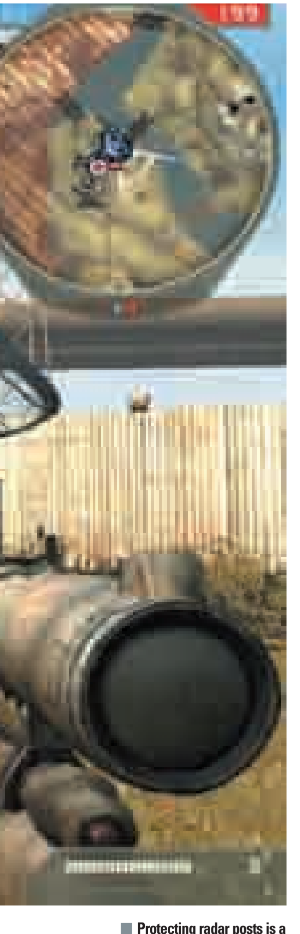


BETTER THAN

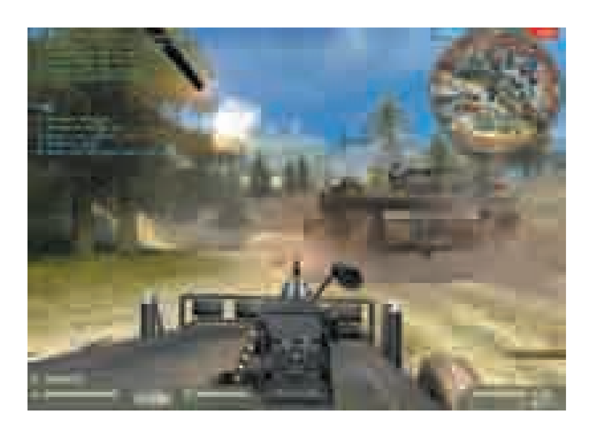
AS GOOD AS



JOINT OPS: TYPHOON RISING



■ Protecting radar posts is a good idea, but using a tank might be going a tad too far….





BATTLEFIELD 2

EYES FRONT, SOLDIER – THIS IS OUR WAR, NOT YOURS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Sweden

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Digital Illusions CE

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-64 online)

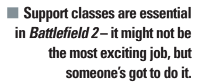
MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium 4 1.7GHz processor, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb graphics card, 2.3Gb HDD space, 128Kbps internet connection

So, at long last we have a proper *Battlefield* sequel (one with a number after the name and everything) as opposed to just, say, a mod or add-on full of extra vehicles, new scenarios or an alternative texture set replacing desert wastes with overgrown jungles. Not that you'd know to look at it though. Guns? Vehicles? Checkpoints? Soldiers shooting each other? All present and correct. But then, that's the biggest problem with games that, despite being hugely enjoyable and involving, are based on a handful of simple concepts; there's only so much you can change before the game becomes something else and loses its original appeal. *Battlefield 1942* was great. *Battlefield Vietnam* was great, even if it didn't do much beyond shifting the action three decades forwards and one continent over. So it goes without saying that just by being based on the same concept, *Battlefield 2* is great. Really, it is.

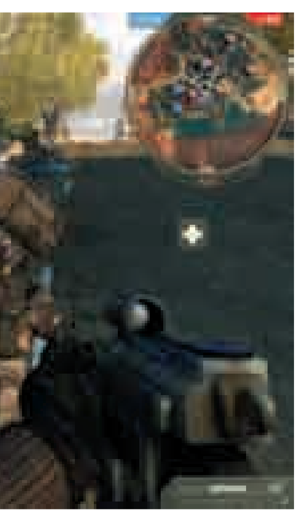
Those of you who haven't looked at the score yet will know that it's slightly more complicated than that, while those of you who have turned the page and noticed that *Battlefield 2*'s score is higher than that of *Vietnam* will be wondering what *Battlefield 2* does to make it better. And it is better – much better. For all its superficial similarities to its predecessors, *Battlefield 2* represents a far better understanding of exactly what war entails; an effort to put the player in the heart of a battle where advancement is more strategic than just running around looking for a target, success is about defence as well as attack, and death is more meaningful than just being able to respawn at the nearest checkpoint as though nothing happened.

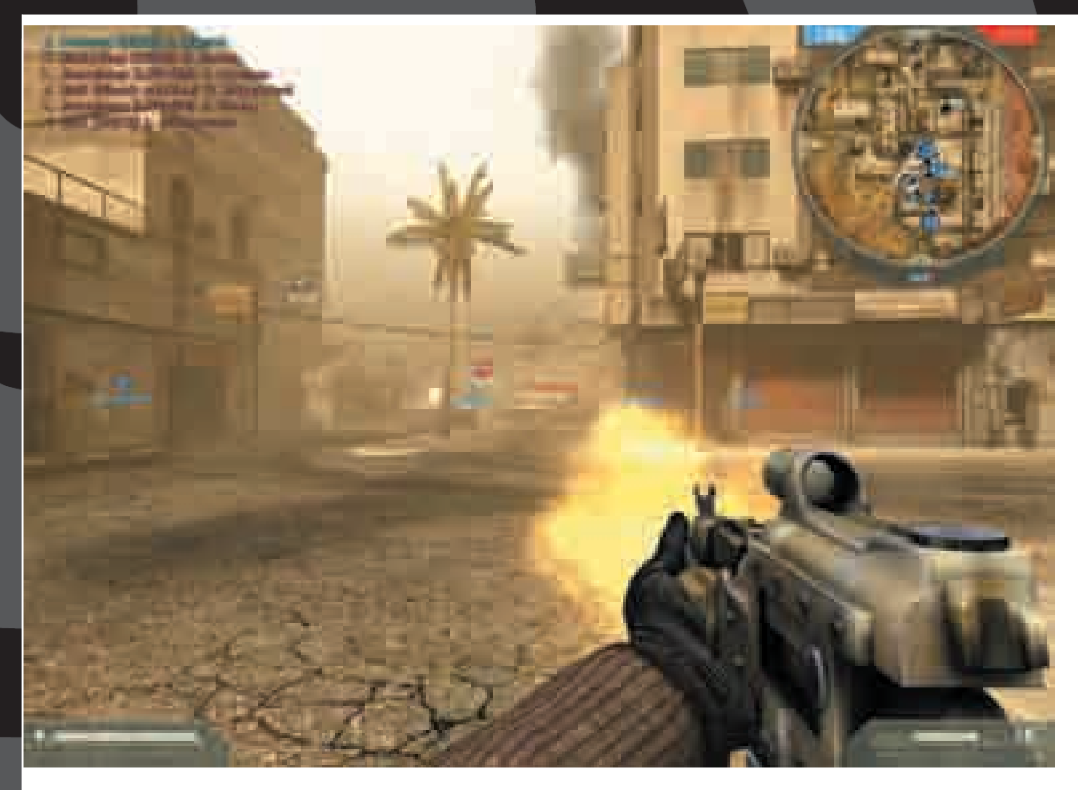
Perhaps some, but certainly not all, of this change comes from Digital Illusions' attention to detail in the battlezones. Each one feels tighter and better designed than previous efforts, using the best of both *1942* and *Vietnam*. They're open enough to allow plenty of vehicle movement, but never leave infantry players feeling vulnerable or exposed (something that, combined with the many ways that players can approach the all-important checkpoints, allows those preferring the more subtle approach plenty of opportunities for success). Other touches that initially seem unimportant also enhance the game's tense atmosphere: startled birds fly up from trees if you disturb them, potentially giving your position away; dust clouds rise up amid explosive confrontations, leaving you firing blind; shellshock from nearby explosions disorientates you, blurring your vision for a moment; flagpoles clatter in the ▷

"FOR ALL ITS SIMILARITIES TO ITS PREDECESSORS, BATTLEFIELD 2 BOASTS A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF EXACTLY WHAT WAR ENTAILS"



■ Support classes are essential in *Battlefield 2* – it might not be the most exciting job, but someone's got to do it.

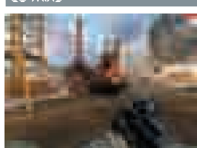




24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

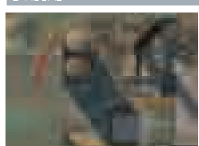
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

20 MINS



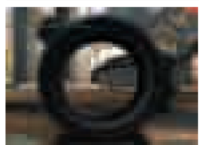
So, it's *Battlefield* – if you've played it before, you know exactly what you're doing, if not, it's easy to pick up. Run, shoot, capture… it's hardly rocket science, is it?

5 HOURS



A revelation: it takes a bit more than just running, shooting and capturing to do well at *Battlefield 2*. Co-operation and teamwork is where it's at now.

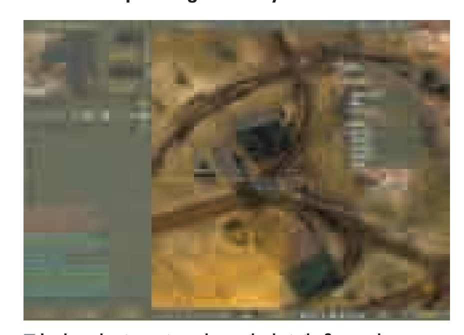
3 WEEKS



You've earned plenty of points, risen up through the ranks and have enough ability to be a Commander. Welcome to the elite, soldier – you've got your stripes.

COMMAND AND CONQUER

If you're lucky enough to be chosen as a Commander, then your job involves far more than that of just another soldier. Through the Commander screen you have access to the entire battlefield; observe and dictate the movements of your troops through either pre-recorded commands or the Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) if you have a microphone, send in supplies when your squads request them, perform scans revealing enemy positions that you can then relay to your men, order artillery strikes on heavily populated enemy sites… the game can change dramatically if the Commander does his job properly. True, you can play *Battlefield 2* as you always have done, but if you come up against a well-organised team led by such a player, don't expect to get an easy win…



Issuing orders to your troops is easy thanks to the Commander screen – just be sure to hide in a safe place before you do it though.

breeze as you patiently wait for that excruciating possession timer to tick down, only for distant gunfire to break the silence. Minor things, yes, but ones that add up to a feeling that this really is war, and not just a few gamers duking it out online over possession of a few checkpoints.

Of course, the key word there is 'online' – despite featuring throwaway single-player modes that were only there so players could learn the maps, the original *Battlefield* titles were intended for online play and this sequel is no different. However, the biggest and most important change in *Battlefield 2* is one that affects both parts of the game by completely altering the way you can approach a multiplayer game, while also making the single-player game someway playable. Admittedly, experiencing the Commander and squad elements of *Battlefield 2* for the first time can be slightly disorientating, simply because they go against everything that *Battlefield* has stood for in the past. Team play has always been important, true, but with everyone wanting to be a hero, actual co-ordination of movement was haphazard at best. Once mastered, however, these two rather simple additions shed a whole new light on the strategy of winning at *Battlefield*, almost to the point of making you realise how little strategy there was in the first place.

> "THE GAME'S SHIFT IN FOCUS FROM PURE ACTION TO STRATEGIC PLAY REALLY TAKES BATTLEFIELD 2 ABOVE AND BEYOND THE ORIGINAL"

The concept of squad play is self-explanatory: any player can join a squad if one exists, or start their own if they feel so inclined. Once a squad's been constructed, its members can see each other's positions on the map and co-ordinate movement across said map – hardly a revolutionary change, considering you could do that in previous *Battlefield* titles, albeit without the luxury of your own communication channel. Not surprisingly though, there's more to it than just being there to back each other up. The squad leader, for example, plays a pivotal role in the group's survival, not just because so long as your team has one checkpoint held, he automatically becomes a mobile spawn point for the members of his squad (giving them an incentive to keep him alive) but also because he's the only means of contact between the squad and the most important member of your team, the Commander.

Ah yes, the Commander. We suspect that more gung-ho players will initially prefer the lure of being in the field to assuming such a pointless-sounding role – after all, being granted the title doesn't give you a bigger gun or make you immune to enemy fire, so what good does it do? In fact, the benefits are more numerous than you could possibly know, despite the fact that being a Commander means you could be giving up your rights to run into the breach with all guns blazing. As the cornerstone of the entire team, a Commander can be instrumental to his side's

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

A CLASS ACT: Two extra character classes add extra strategy when choosing your squad.

TEAM TACTICS: Build squads then get tactical by using the Commander to co-ordinate your men.

RANK AND FILE

No matter which role you ultimately play in each battle, your successes (and failures) make a difference to how your online profile progresses. Flag captures, kills, assists and other achievements all equate to points that are assigned to your profile, which are then stored on EA's servers for all to see. The better you do, the more points you'll accumulate and the higher up the ranks you'll move – as higher-ranked players get priority when it comes to assigning the Commander position, it pays to be further up the ladder. However, points also unlock new weapons for the various character classes, allowing you to switch out old guns in favour of better ones – yet another incentive for you to keep playing even once you think you've seen everything.





This is what a few packs of C4 can do in the right place. Just don't be too close when they blow…



Real gun sights for real guns – if you prefer a zoomed-in view, say goodbye cursor and hello big chunk of metal.

success and it's this addition that completely alters how *Battlefield 2* can be played – 'can' being the critical point there, as strategic play using a Commander only supplements the potential free-range vigilantism rather than supplanting it.

Armed as he is with the ability to view all the action on the battlefield as it happens (either through an expanded version of the spawn map everyone sees or a zoomed-in satellite view that's close enough to see exactly what any given soldier is doing) and a variety of support, radar and offensive commands, it's his job to give the squads the advice and help they need; clearly, being Commander takes more than just a good aim. Conversely, the presence of a Commander changes the objectives for the other team; take out critical targets such as the opposition's radar station or command base and you can render even the most decorated Commander useless.

Certainly, there are other improvements that make a difference in *Battlefield 2*: two additional character classes (Special Forces, for more skilled players, and Support, the ammunition equivalent of the Medic); enhanced skills and area effects for the Engineer and Medic classes; better handling and control of airborne vehicles; the replacement of the crosshair with actual weapon sights when zooming in with any weapon; the all-important but limited ability to sprint across cover-free terrain… But it's the game's fundamental shift in focus from pure action to strategic play that really takes *Battlefield 2* above and beyond the original. No doubt it'll take time for the community to clutch the game to its bosom – if only because so many of them favour shooting first before they've even thought of the questions – but once co-ordinated clans start taking to the servers, it'll change the face of *Battlefield* forever. Given that the game hasn't really evolved that much since its inception, can that possibly be a bad thing? Sir, no, sir.



VERDICT 9/10

A TACTICAL, BALANCED, BETTER BATTLEFIELD

FAQs

Q. IS IT JUST THE SAME?
Well, yes. And no. But more yes.

Q. SO WHY SHOULD I BUY IT?
Because it's better than before. The changes and improvements are rather obvious, but they still make it a far superior experience.

Q. WHAT'S IT LIKE OFFLINE?
The single-player mode is certainly improved over previous incarnations, but it's still just a 'practice' area for the online multiplayer – learn the maps and then decimate your opponents.



While often complicated, the laser-based levels are some of the best *Smart Bomb* has to offer.



The ball puzzles are usually solved by 'leapfrogging' between switches to progress further. What fun.

SOMEBODY SET UP US THE BOMB

SMART BOMB

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Core Design

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
September '05
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

It's a widely accepted principle that simple puzzle games – often using just one button – are the best. *Tetris*, *Mr Driller*, *Denki Blocks* – pretty much all of the finest puzzlers can be played (at a basic level, at least) by an infant, an imbecile or even an insect. Perhaps. But in this case, we can't see feelers and compound eyes being of much use. You see, unfortunately for *Smart Bomb*, it's hard to think of a more complex concept than the one that Eidos has brought to the PSP with its debut handheld title. On the plus side, at least you're eased in gently.

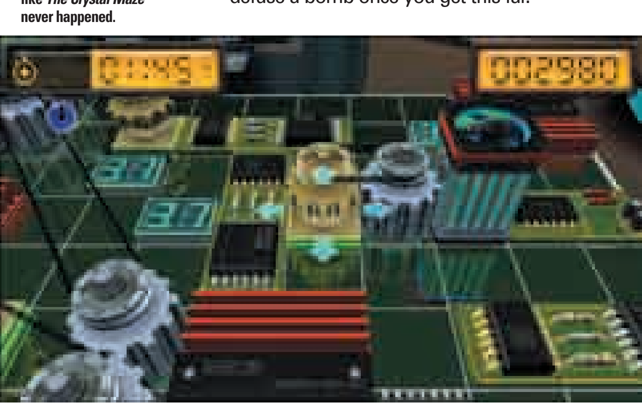
The puzzles that make up your first target for defusal serve as a tutorial of sorts – each is accessed from the central bomb hub and by clearing a set of them the deeper stages of the bomb become accessible, culminating in the core itself. While the puzzles vary greatly between devices, this central core is constant for all bombs and takes the form of a memory game: pull out the green rods but not red ones as the pillar spins. Simple, right? Yes, actually – until fairly late in the game it won't take much cranial straining to defuse a bomb once you get this far.

But it's in the puzzles themselves where the real game lies. These vary massively in style, intensity and general quality – you'll find yourself rolling balls around mazes in a *Mercury*-esque fashion (albeit with slightly less finesse), spinning tiles to connect LEDs (while the bomb randomly turns tiles around for you – thanks for that) and even indulging in simple tests of memory and logic that, as you might expect, get progressively more ridiculous as you plough through the game. And even though each puzzle is explained before it gets tough a few stages down the line, there are still a few that are a little too complex for their own good (as if the game wasn't frustrating enough already).

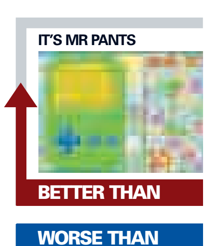
games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
TENSION: The music goes mental, the screen goes bonkers and you panic as the clock ticks down.
VARIETY: The spread of puzzles is as wide as it is erratic, so there's something for everyone.

But while *Smart Bomb* is brimming with neat ideas and some really tense moments, it's largely devoid of one key element – fun. A number of the puzzles are really intense and enjoyable, but there's an equal (if not greater) number that feel more like a chore. However, the one key flaw that stops *Smart Bomb* being a great game is the fact that where each bomb is made up of numerous puzzles, failing one task detonates the bomb and sends you back to the start. As the game goes on this can undo 15 or 20 minutes of hard graft, and as the dwindling time limits force some of the puzzles into trial and error territory, frustration sets in like you can only imagine – repeating that dodgy five-minute ball 'puzzle' is far more effort than a quick flick of the power switch, after all…

Move the cogs to complete the primitive circuit. It's like *The Crystal Maze* never happened.

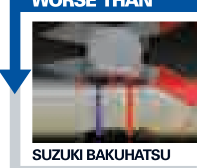


IT'S MR PANTS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SUZUKI BAKUHATSU



VERDICT 5/10
FRUSTRATING BUT STILL AN INTERESTING CONCEPT


eMag

NAMCO CROSSES CAPCOM – UTTER CHAOS ENSUES

NAMCO X CAPCOM

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
Monolith Soft

PRICE
¥5,900

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

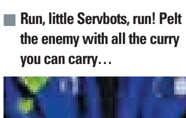
PLAYERS
1

Every spring in Tokyo, when the cherry blossoms bloom, groups of friends and office workers have parties called hanami, meaning 'flower viewing'. You're not really viewing the flowers, however; you're merely drinking as much as possible in the presence of people you haven't seen in a while. There are too many people around, too much general chaos for anyone to notice if you kiss your secretary, or even if you punch your boss. And that's kind of the point of the chaos: drink that beer, eat that croquette, laugh appropriately when so-and-so throws up on such-and-such. *Namco X Capcom* is the videogame equivalent of a hanami: people you haven't seen in years keep popping up to say hello, you say hello back and sooner or later the party's over, you're drunk, and all you've done is say hello to around 200 people. All without the floral occasion.

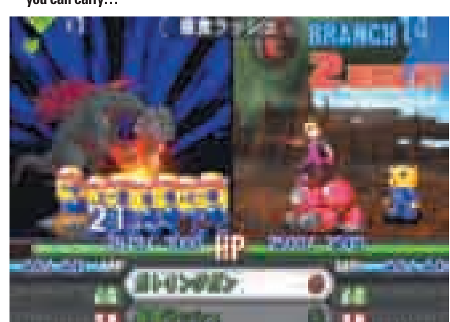
Like a child with dolls, *Namco X Capcom* throws together 200 characters from the history of Namco and Capcom with such exuberant glee it's almost breathtaking to behold. The first battle is a perfect example – two futuristic cops named Reiji and Shaomu are chasing a dimensional disturbance, which happens to be the Gnosis aliens from *Xenosaga*. Soon, Shion and Kos-Mos from *Xenosaga* arrive to initiate The Hilbert Effect, at which point the aliens become attackable, and the game turns into a standard strategy RPG; move your characters around square by square, attack when you're near an enemy, heal when you're hurt. After a round of this, Interpol agent Chun-Li comes bursting in chasing Cammy's three flunkies. They all work for the evil M. Bison's Shadowloo syndicate and have something to do with the summoning of the aliens to Earth.

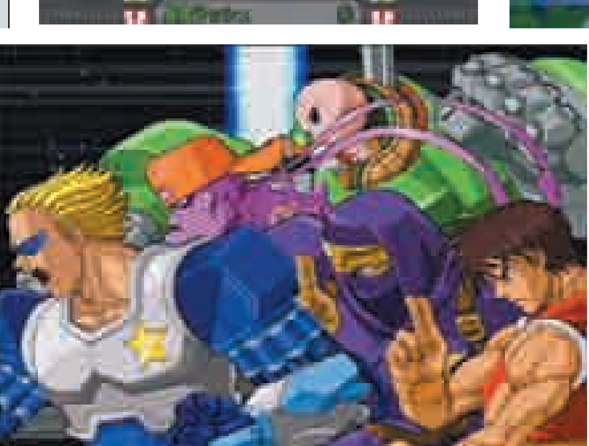
And that's the story set-up. How it goes from that to *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*' King Arthur, Dimitri from *Darkstalkers*, and Klonoa facing off against the undead is both unpredictable and totally predictable at the same time. Chaos is the order of the day – after ten hours playing this game, you'll no doubt be so ready for anything that nothing will surprise you any more. There's some charm in that, though it might annoy some players who have no idea what Klonoa is supposed to be.

To its credit, *Namco X Capcom* boasts some wonderful music; when it's a character's turn on the battlefield, his or her game's music begins pumping, with the *Street Fighter II* remixes being of special note. The thumping sound effects are strangely nostalgia-inducing. The characters, in their new sprite models, all look equally charming; on the map screen they 'breathe' by repeatedly being vertically stretched and then released to bounce by some unseen hand. During battle, they animate well and appropriately scream out names of super moves.



Run, little Servbots, run! Pelt the enemy with all the curry you can carry…





It's possible to rack up some particularly extensive combos once you get the hang of things.





Many of Namco's characters – like *Xenosaga*'s Kos-Mos – look great in their cartoon forms.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LEAGUE OF ITS OWN: Though clearly a strategy RPG, the box bears the category 'other'.

CROSS COUNTER: *NXC* is the first crossover title to offer so many characters – over 200, to be precise.



I TO THE G, YO

Namco X Capcom's Eurobeat-pumping, hundred-character-cameo-filled introduction video was handled by Production IG, famed anime studio that produced the likes of _Ghost In The Shell_. The unique style seen in the intro video (which players on Japanese message boards are calling 'the best part of the game') is actually the work of Imai Toonz, director of Production IG's over-the-top 2004 eye-burner _Dead Leaves_. We play videogames to see amazing things, do we not? And _Namco X Capcom_'s intro video is pretty amazing. In this age of CG, it takes hand-drawn animation (Toonz insists on using no computers, even for parts that look like they're done by computer) for critics to really take notice.

The battle system is most noteworthy as, at the end of the day, *NXC* is one big parade of strategy battles. However, unlike, say, *Front Mission*, when you choose to attack the enemy that isn't the end of it – you now have to control the attack from a perspective that's one part *Namco Tales* game and one part *Xenogears*. Circle is your attack button, and pressing it with one of the four directions launches a different attack. Enemies can be hit into the air and juggled with a follow-up attack if you know which move to use; knowing the right move is a big deal because sometimes you're fighting with a team and a move might involve a member switch that requires a second's pause, which might hinder your juggling potential. It's all a matter of feeling out your characters through repeated use. The camera pans, zooms and tilts wildly until you've used all of a character's attack points for the turn. It'd be nice to see this unique battling system put to work on an inspired RPG, or else a tactical RPG with some battle maps that have hills, or at least staircases.

These little mini-game-esque battles are fun; defending by using rhythm-game-like tappings of the D-pad is equally fun. Yet, at the end of the day, some players will feel like they don't know their characters well enough, or that there are just too many characters flying in and out of the storyline. It is an exuberant game, yes, and its exuberance in being silly has some severely grating results. The game talks too much – you'll watch text scroll in a text box roughly as many times as you'll see Ryu pull off a Hadoken, and that's a hell of a lot of times. The text contributes to the ongoing storyline, though we'll be damned if the story isn't a sneering lump of misdirected satirical one-liners that make the player who understands them feel like a hopeless geek.

There is a point when the game quietens down, when the onslaught of cameos slows to a halt. This also happens to be the closing stage; only at this time does the player get to truly play at his own pace and enjoy what the individual characters have to offer. Such a shame the prerequisite for such enjoyment is 50 hours of nonsense.

VERDICT 7/10

POSSIBLY GAMING'S BIGGEST ICE-CREAM HEADACHE EVER

SHINING FORCE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



PHANTOM BRAVE

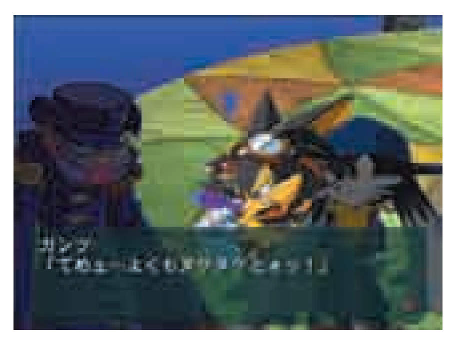
FAQs

Q. IS JAPANESE KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY?
If you want to understand the story, yes. However, the less you understand the story, the better. Maybe.

Q. THE STORY'S REALLY THAT STUPID?
Yes it is. People who really like anime about anime, for example, seem to love it, though. And the battles are damned easy.

Q. IS PAC-MAN IN THERE?
The big question. None of the official trailers show him, and we won't spoil the secret either way.









It's been a while since we enjoyed a good point-and-click adventure. It seems like years ago since we last indulged in a few bouts of Insult Sword Fighting or visited The World's Largest Ball Of Twine – probably because it actually was years ago. Quality games in this genre have dried up on the PC and, being mouse-less, the current generation of consoles have too many control issues when developers attempt to drag the experience over to them. Short of digging out your old copies of *Grim Fandango*, there's little that can be done. It's a sad time for adventure fans.

But, as is so often the case in the movies, just when you think the dream could be over, a new hero rises to save the day. The DS. Fair enough, it may seem an unlikely machine to provide a home for the adventure puzzle titles of the future, but the more you think about it the more it makes sense – and it all looks to start with *Another Code: Two Memories*. The game begins when your typical teenage girl named Ashley gets a message from

ANOTHER CODE:

CING DELIVERS A DS TITLE TO REMEMBER



her dead father. Obviously, she's intrigued by this sudden resurrection and heads out to the island where he claims to be residing. All manner of happenings involving memories take place and you team up with D, a ghost who has no recollection of his own death.

This may seem a little vague but, essentially, the story is the driving force of this title and for us to reveal more would merely be robbing you of your £30 should you opt to make a purchase. Actually, that isn't entirely correct. Although point-and-click-esque games are known for their storylines, there's another element contained within the genre that drives players onward – the puzzles. This is the area where *Another Code* manages to outperform most titles; not for the actual challenge of the puzzles, it's more to do with how they're presented. With all the interactive elements the DS has to offer, the machine turns out to be quite the playground for creative developers. Making use of all the features available, you'll be scribbling on notebooks with the stylus, shooting and layering photographs you've taken to piece together clues, and blowing into the mic to mist up windows – for once it actually feels as if the game was designed with these features in mind rather than just using them because they're there.

The dual screens are also used effectively and the bottom screen will allow you to control Ashley from a plan view, while the top will let you

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED	Nintendo DS
ORIGIN	Japan
PUBLISHER	Nintendo
DEVELOPER	Cing Inc
PRICE	£29.99
RELEASE	Out Now
PLAYERS	1



Rocks? In the way? This looks like a job for a stylus.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

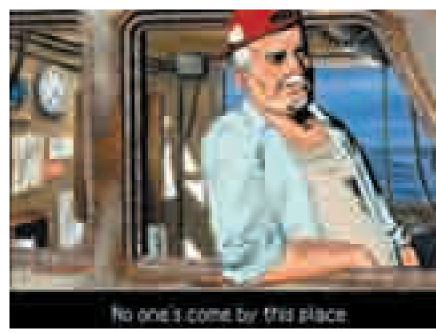
NEW GROUND: An adventure/puzzle game on the DS? We never saw that one coming.

TOUCH ME: Point-and-click gameplay with a stylus rather than a mouse works perfectly.

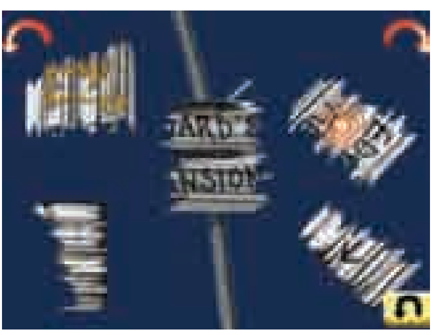




TWO MEMORIES



Talking to the locals is easily the best way to fill in the gaps in the plot. We suggest you do it lots.



Puzzles like this are well thought out but hardly taxing. We evolved beyond the five-piece jigsaw long ago.



The story's intriguing enough to keep you playing, but just make sure you're paying attention else you'll get caught out.

see through her eyes and let her look around the many locations for items and clues. It's a system that works reasonably well, the only real gripe being your character's inability to take an object unless you're already aware of where it must be used – it's an annoying element that means much needless backtracking and searching areas multiple times.

As irritating as this is, our main complaint regarding *Another Code* is its difficulty. Although the title may look and feel as if it's working hard to stroll away from Nintendo's reputation for delivering games intended for kids and fanboys, there are few over the age of 15 who won't have the entire thing beaten in about five hours. As innovative as many of the puzzles are, you can't help but feel that maybe too much effort has been put into the design and not enough into the actual content, and once you've figured out exactly what you're supposed to be doing and how you go about achieving it there's little more for you to put your mind to other than wandering onward to the next minor task.

This is very unfortunate, as the game shows so much promise. This is the first time, apart from games such as *Zoo Keeper* and *Meteos*, that the DS's capabilities have been used to good effect and – in some areas – expanded on to the point that we can see many developers in the future 'borrowing' ideas for their own games. *Another Code: Two Memories* manages to achieve what it sets out to do perfectly and has raised the bar for DS titles once again. It's definitely worth a try, but just don't expect to spend too much time with it.

VERDICT 7/10

A GREAT FOUNDATION FOR NINTENDO TO BUILD UPON



FORGET ME NOT

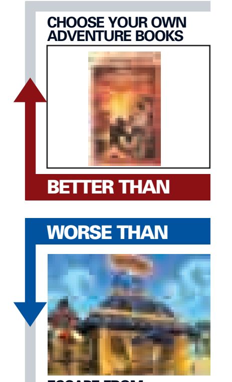
In many games it's easy to just cruise through and not pay too much attention to the story that's trying desperately to envelop you – something that *Another Code* is not going to let you get away with. At various stages throughout the game you'll be stopped and quizzed about what's happened so far. This isn't really very difficult as these sections take the form of a collection of multiple-choice questions that deliver no penalty at all should you get an answer wrong, but it's yet another example of how much thought has gone into the game – not to mention the fact that it makes sure you're paying attention.

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG ARE WE TALKING?
Not that long, unfortunately. Probably about five hours if you're persistent.

Q. ANY EXTRAS?
Afraid not. Once you're done, you're done.

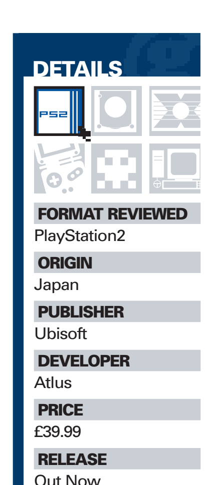
Q. WILL THERE BE A SEQUEL?
More than likely – Nintendo's planning to go all the way with this one.



SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: LUCIFER'S CALL

DEFINITELY A CASE OF THIRD TIME LUCKY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Atlus

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

The *Shin Megami Tensei* series is something that, unless you're keen on importing, you've probably missed out on so far. However, thanks to Atlus teaming up with Ubisoft we can now join in the fun with instalment number three. And seeing as how this third game is considered the best of the series so far in territories where parts one and two are widely available, this seems as good a place to join as any.

Features-wise, what really makes *Lucifer's Call* stand out from most RPGs is the ability to tempt enemies to join your party. It sounds simple enough but actually requires a far more tactical approach to conflicts than you might expect. Unsurprisingly, opponents don't actually want to join you but most are weak-minded, so certain characters can use enticing manoeuvres to break them down. You also have to consider peer pressure – an enemy won't turn to your cause if there are others of his species involved in the battle. In short, if you want the best minions on your side, you're going to have to work for them.

On the subject of possible allies, it's always nice to see a familiar face and the opportunity to recruit the demi-demon Dante into your party is a nice touch. It's bound to make fans of the *Devil May Cry* series hoot with joy, but in many ways the character's inclusion seems solely for this purpose, and he almost seems forced into the story. It's an idea that works well though, and if we're going to have a guest appearance it might as well be from Dante.



This is some sort of hell. You'll visit it but the game isn't all about being knee-deep in goo.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FRIENDS LIKE THESE: There are over a hundred enemies that can be tempted into joining your cause.

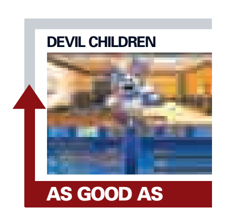
DEVIL ARMS: There are few games out there that have been blessed with Dante's presence.

This third game in the series is a fine piece of work and, despite getting slightly tedious as you go on, almost makes up for the fact that UK gamers have missed out on the first two titles. The new features ensure an involving – not to mention time-consuming – experience and the darker, more mature theme is a welcome change from the Technicolor characters that many games in the genre spew forth. Also, amazingly, even without playing the previous games the story is more accessible than those in many recent offerings, so the fact that you were either unable or unwilling to import to get your hands on the first couple of games means very little – this is still a worthy use for your pennies.



VERDICT 7/10
DEFINITELY A GOOD CALL

DEVIL CHILDREN

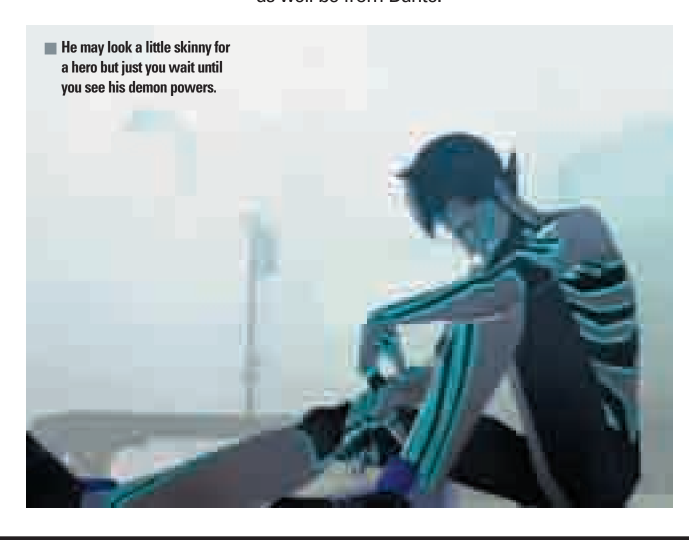


AS GOOD AS

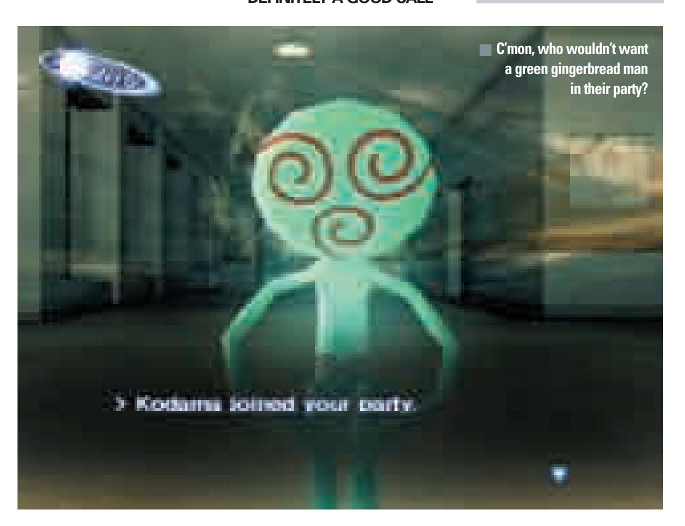
WORSE THAN



FINAL FANTASY X-2



He may look a little skinny for a hero but just you wait until you see his demon powers.



C'mon, who wouldn't want a green gingerbread man in their party?


eMag



While Tension Moves make the leap to four-player intact, Instant Kill moves have understandably been removed.



Leaping into the background can help avoid big linear attacks, so long as there isn't too much craziness going on back there too.



Train yourself not to blink and you might just get good at *Isuka*. That's only a 'might', mind – no promises here…

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TAP INTO FIGHTING: Get four pads together and enjoy some mental 2D brawling.

LOOK AT HIM: A button to change directions? You don't see that every day…

GUILTY GEAR ISUKA

MORE PLAYERS MEANS MORE FUN – IT WILL WORK



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
505

DEVELOPER
Sammy

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Regular readers may have picked up on our fixation with *Street Fighter III* by now – we like nothing better than to kick back with Dudley and the rest of the gang and kill a few hours with our mad parrying skills. While the game's quality can't really be questioned, stagnation in the genre has meant that very little has been able to challenge its crown. And so up steps Sammy with something really rather novel – a four-player 2D beat-'em-up. 'That'll never work,' we hear you cry. And, annoyingly, you'd be on the money. Depending, of course, on how you intend to play it…

There are a number of attempts to keep the lone player entertained – GG Boost (a *Final Fight*-esque mode) is really quite horrendous, while Factory (an interesting mode in which you can fully customise Robo-Ky II with new moves, parameters and abilities) needs too much input from GG Boost mode to make it worthwhile. Even Arcade mode is largely a waste of time thanks to the fact that being ganged up on by several CPU opponents can see your life bar decimated in seconds while you can do nothing but watch.

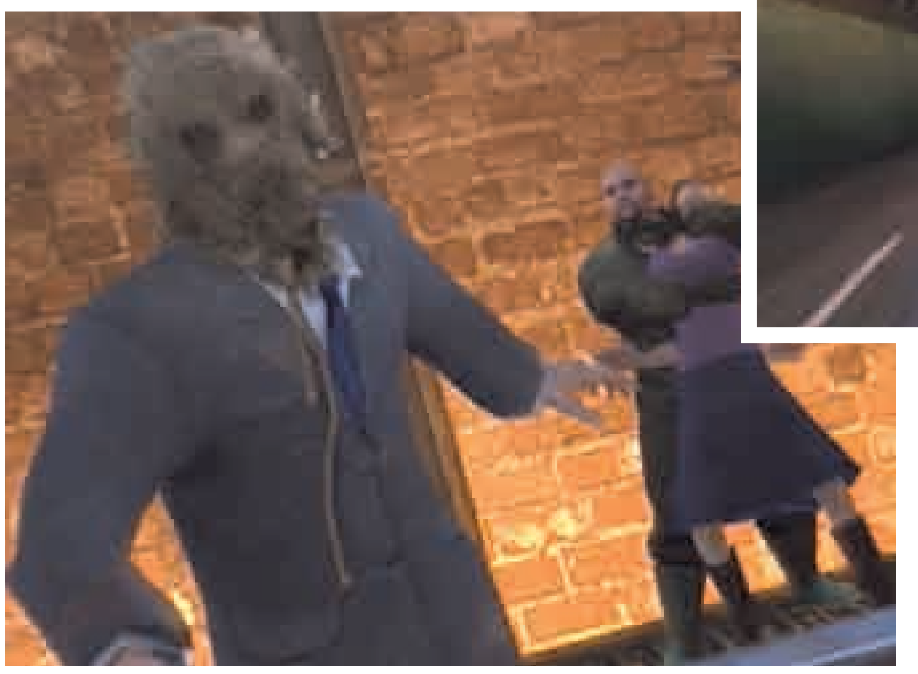
Gather a few mates, though, and the story is quite different. While it can hardly be considered the most technical fighter, four-player *Isuka* is fantastic fun – free-for-alls and team games both have their own strategies and the novelty alone will mean that most fighting game fans will get something of a kick out of this, even if only for a while. To the untrained eye, it can often seem less like a fight and more like a huge explosion of colour followed by a winner being declared. In truth, this isn't far off the mark, but with a little practice and a lot of concentration it is possible to keep abreast of the situation.

Guilty Gear Isuka is a brave attempt to do something new in a traditionally safe genre and, as such, it'd be rude not to congratulate it for trying. Unfortunately, measures included to make the four-way fighting work – the inclusion of a 'turn around' button, for example – mean that with anything less than three players, *Isuka* is all but redundant. Still, if you're looking for something a little off-the-wall and you've got a few friends round, the unique nature of this latest *Guilty Gear* title should be enough to drag you away from your 2D brawler of choice for a few hours.



VERDICT 6/10
UNIQUE AND ENTERTAINING IF A TOUCH MESSY

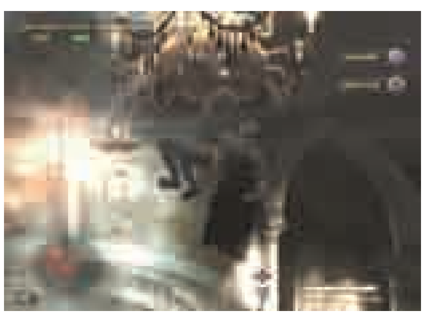

eMag



Having a hessian sack on your head makes you evil and scary, apparently. Perhaps because you get cross about having an itchy face.



The Batmobile levels are a bit like *Burnout 3*. Not as good, though.



The game looks pretty enough, but it's just so… meh.

BATMAN BEGINS

HOLY MEDIOCRITY, BATMAN

There was no way that *Batman Begins* was going to make it through the cinema without a videogame being attached to it – Electronic Arts would never let that happen. But, with the film going back to the very beginning of the Dark Knight's mythology and removing the camp, Day-Glo feel of the last couple of movies, maybe there was some hope of this particular movie licence going well.

Sadly, for a game that's supposed to portray Bruce Wayne's return to darkness and focus on the fear caused by dressing as a big bat, some of the animations still manage to look as if they've been ripped from an Eighties cartoon series. Stealth attacks and sneaky alternative routes aren't going to help achieve the atmosphere attempted if the hero manages to look as if he's swimming up a mesh fence rather than climbing it. These animations are unfortunate as, on the whole, the game manages to do a much better job of showing what Batman is actually about than any previous title featuring the hero, but when he starts stuttering up a ladder you can't help but cringe a little.

But *Batman Begins*' main letdown is the gameplay. Although causing enemies to fear you in order weaken them before a fight is a clever idea, it seems a little unrealised. Finding the kegs to explode or the scaffold support you need to destroy in order to achieve this effect is never that difficult, but being forced to search for new ways to achieve this before you enter every room becomes tedious after the first two missions, and there really is very little variation from this routine as the game progresses.

What variation there is comes in the form of the Batmobile – apparently driving through Gotham is very much like playing *Burnout 3*, though not nearly as much fun. Seeing the words 'Thug Takedown' appear on the screen as we nudged a car into the railings just made us want to go and play the real thing. Though, in fairness, when compared to the tagged-on driving section usually found lurking in games of this genre it's really not a bad effort.

Ultimately, a movie licence of this type is going to sell whatever we say – we could well be looking at a number one here. Unfortunately, *Batman Begins* won't deserve such elevated status as it's average to the core.



VERDICT 4/10
AVERAGE AT BEST

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMAT
GameCube, Xbox

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Eurocom

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

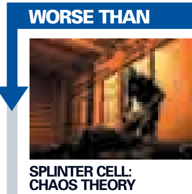


RED NINJA



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

SOMEONE GET SNK A NEW CALENDAR…

KING OF FIGHTERS 2002

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ignition

DEVELOPER
SNK/Eolith

PRICE
£19.99

RELEASE
29 July '05

PLAYERS
1-2

There are many hardcore gamers, but some of the hardest core (if such a thing exists) are the beat-'em-up fans. You know the sort – capable of naming the world's top-ten ranked players of any title at any time, and armed with the ability to think solely in quarter circles and double taps. It's easy to see why, though; despite the march of time these games never become unplayable. How the game looks becomes irrelevant and what matters is the balance of characters and how frequently the opportunities to be 'scrubby cheap' occur. It's for these reasons that we're seeing the *King Of Fighters* series being re-released for a new generation to enjoy. It was only a few months ago that we were rediscovering our skills on *KOF 2001*, but now this has been cast aside in favour of attempted mastery of the 2002 instalment.

Although Eolith was responsible for the large changes found in *KOF 2003*, the studio first started to get involved with *KOF 2002* while it was still very much SNK's baby, so there are some noticeable changes from *KOF 2001*. The key difference is that the fights are straight three-character rounds, which means there's no annoying fourth character jumping in and giving you a kicking when you least expect it. As great as the Strikers were in *2001*, we still couldn't help but feel a little cheated when they seemed to turn the tide of a match so easily.

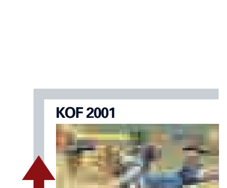
Our main gripe is the controls – to be fair, that's something that can't be blamed on the game itself but rather the Xbox pad's reluctance to work with 2D fighting games. As a result, a double backwards half circle is near enough impossible to pull off. Admittedly, this is unlikely to bother true fight fans as they live by the joystick, but beginners could well be put off by the fact they're unable to pull off many of the better moves, so they'll move on to something a little simpler.

Most of you will already know that you're not going to be dazzled by an impressive show of graphics if you pick up *KOF 2002*, nor should anyone be surprised by the substandard tunes that accompany your bouts. But sketchy music and coconut-sized pixels are a small price to pay for the chance to dabble with one of the finest two-dimensional beat-'em-ups ever made. Combine this with the chance to play over Live and the low price, and we certainly recommend you pay Mr Bogard and friends another visit.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
THREE OF A KIND: The removal of Strikers means pure three-on-three action.
DYING BREATH: Desperation Moves means the fight ain't over 'til the fat lady sings.

VERDICT 7/10
IT STILL FEELS SO RIGHT

KOF 2001

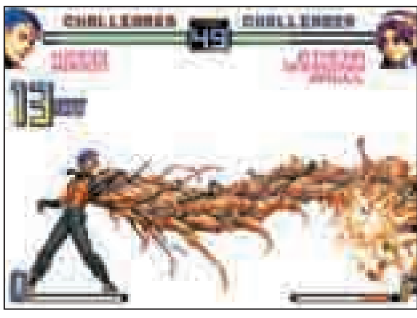


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



STREET FIGHTER III



The satisfaction's still there. We smiled lots when we pulled off K9999's Super Special.



Screw the third dimension – two will be quite enough, thanks.



Sure, it looks ridiculously silly – and he looks like Dave Perry – but the damage, oh, the damage.



Being able to move and attack several times per turn makes certain strategic choices much harder to make than in other similar titles.



Team attacks are powerful enough at the best of times but find a set of willing members and the unique ones are more awesome still.



Each character can be assigned a passive skill, in this case restoring health based on how much AP has been used. Handy, eh?

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Atlus

DEVELOPER
Pinegrow

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

STELLA DEUS: THE GATE OF ETERNITY

MORE GRIDS? SOMEBODY TELL THEM THEY'VE GOT THE WRONG KIND OF ATLAS…

As much as we love strategy RPGs, we've noticed a strange trend among them lately. Here, above all other genres, you very rarely see a truly terrible title. While the odd dreadful puzzle game slips out as pitiful adventures and horrible shooters flood the market, it's as though the few companies still at work in the RPG world can't put a foot wrong. The likes of Atlus and Nippon Ichi are renowned for their expertise in the field but even lesser-known firms seem to be coming out with respectable titles without fail. And so onto another tactical RPG. Will this one end the winning streak?

No, is the short answer. *Stella Deus* is the classic story of a young hero drawn out of his humble day-to-day existence to help with more pressing issues like saving the world and stuff.



Yeah, you've heard it all before but this tale of the Miasma, a deadly mist that's consuming the world, is as compelling and well delivered as any. Elsewhere, the combat system is easily the strongest element of the game; action points can be split between movement, attacks and abilities in pretty much any combination you like. Usually, this will mean a couple of squares of movement and a few attacks per turn for each character, but by moving only slightly in your turn, that character will get another turn much quicker. This makes for some diverse tactical choices, especially when you experiment with the joys of team attacks and some of the later abilities that can take most of a turn – do you chip away or save your attacks for one huge strike? Of course, every situation requires a different approach. Well, we say every situation…

Cue the part where *Stella Deus* starts being naughty. Its first offence involves the AI – with but a few exceptions, your opponents look like trained warriors yet fight with all the ferocity and awareness of a sleepy badger that's come out of hibernation a few weeks early (yes, we know badgers don't hibernate). Obstacles and raised terrain often hold distant enemies at bay for as long as you wish and, more forgivably, enemies approach in groups as you get close. It's clear that this has been done so you aren't absolutely surrounded by your third turn, but when even foes two or three squares away fail to react to your presence you've got a rather unfair advantage and even key battles can be made that little bit too easy. Still, the story and level design usually find a way to explain this away and/or disguise it so you're free to progress. Ah, about that…

Unfortunately, following the narrative isn't as simple as just doing the missions in sequence.

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY UNITS CAN I USE?
While you'll amass quite an army, you're limited to around six fighters for most missions.

Q. MANY CLASSES?
Loads, most of which can be 'evolved'. You'll stick to the main characters for the most part, though.

Q. WHY?
Because they're more powerful than regular Joes and each has an extra class upgrade, making them substantially tougher.



Setting up your guys is usually simple – beefcakes at the front, magic users and archers at the back. Easy when you know how…



PRETTY IN INK

While they're pretty infrequent, *Stella Deus*' gorgeously rendered cut-scenes are among the best instances we've seen of a 3D game approaching anime territory. The cel-shaded look is reminiscent of *Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter* (albeit far sharper), and while this look is saved for a few specific moments in the game you can't help but look forward to the next generation of hardware when this kind of visual style should be viable throughout a title. Yeah, *killer7* comes close in places but the possibility of new styles like this coming into play over the next few years is as good a reason as any to welcome in the next generation.

In order to power up enough to clear certain tasks you'll need to take frequent trips to the Catacombs, an increasingly difficult descent through battle after battle that feels horribly close to the experience grind that plagues many massively multiplayer titles. Similar arrangements of samey enemies populate the few landscapes that exist and you'll need to return here often to keep your party at (or even close to) a standardised level. This is particularly obvious early on in the game – a couple of early difficulty spikes mean several necessary Catacomb runs and each new party member will need to be broken in slowly there if they're to be of any use in the story battles. Despite this fairly cheap way of adding length and substance to the game, there's plenty of extra-curricular fun to be had. Side quests are plentiful (even if it can be tricky to gauge just how hard they'll be) and through clever fusion of items you're able to get acquire skills, classes and equipment before you'd usually get them.



There's plenty on which to recommend *Stella Deus* but the unfortunate thing about this genre is that it's hard to put your time into more than one or two strategy RPGs a year simply due to the commitment required. Atlus' latest is definitely more compact and accessible than most – as such, it'll fall more easily into most gamers' schedules. If you've not got half a lifetime to invest – or even if you have and you're just up for trying something a little different – *Stella Deus* is an interesting and competent strategy title just waiting to rob you of over 40 hours. Good stuff.



VERDICT 7/10
SOLID AND LENGTHY, IF A TOUCH DRAWN OUT

STELLA STREET

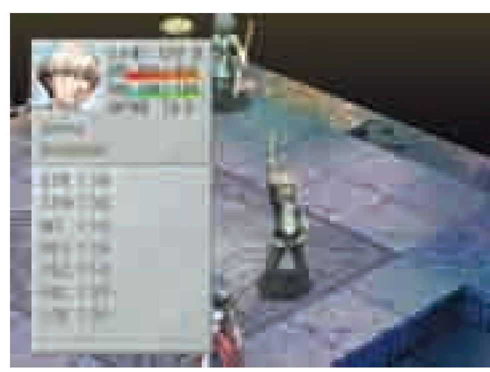


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



STELLA ARTOIS



Level up! The Catacombs are where you'll see this kind of personal betterment the most. In fact, they're the part of the game you'll see most, period.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Hudsonsoft

PRICE
TBC

RELEASE
July '05
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-8

BOMBERMAN DS

EXPLOSIVE TO THE TOUCH



When will developers learn that using the DS touch screen is not always necessary? The machine still has many other fantastic features – Wi-Fi, two well-lit screens…um, some other stuff. Nevertheless, Hudsonsoft (and it's not the only one guilty of this crime) has insisted on jamming a square peg into a circular hole.

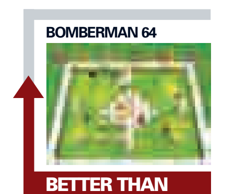
Bomberman's one-player mode has always been sterile and the DS version is no different. Trudging from level to level, blowing up a collection of cute and bizarre enemies, finding a portal, reaching for the 'off' button… nothing new there, then. Except, and this is where the whole peg/hole analogy comes into play, to activate power-ups the game asks you to physically tap on the corresponding icon on the bottom screen. This sounds harmless in theory, and we all know touching is good, but in practice, remembering to tap the bottom screen every few seconds is extremely distracting in the heat of battle. It's all too common to forget to activate numerous power-ups, making the single-player campaign even more of a slog than it always has been.

Thankfully, *Bomberman*'s raison d'etre, Battle mode, is once again its saving grace. Supporting up to eight players via Wi-Fi LAN from a single cartridge, *Bomberman DS* stands tall as perhaps the best multiplayer game currently available on DS. Its accessibility and immediacy are still it's defining factors: *Bomberman* is just as fun now as it was ten years ago. Unfortunately, not everything is perfect. Multiplayer battles, especially at the start, are chronically slow. Not only does this make the first moments of the battle extremely tedious, but it affects the way in which the whole game is played. Experienced Bombermen will be heard cursing at their DSs, as the traps and webs from which they could once escape are now fatal. Remote mines (which detonate at the push of a button) unbalance the game, tipping the scales heavily in the favour of whoever can uncover them first.

The final flaw is the confusion caused by the dual screen. As the multiplayer battle arena is split over the two screens, it's far too tricky to keep track of both, making for some cheap and irritating deaths. None of this will matter, however, when arising victorious from the inferno of battle, looking around the room to see fury in the eyes of seven felled opponents, each pounding furiously at the touch screen to challenge again.

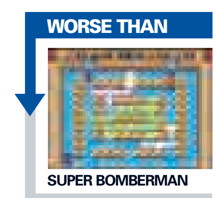


BOMBERMAN 64



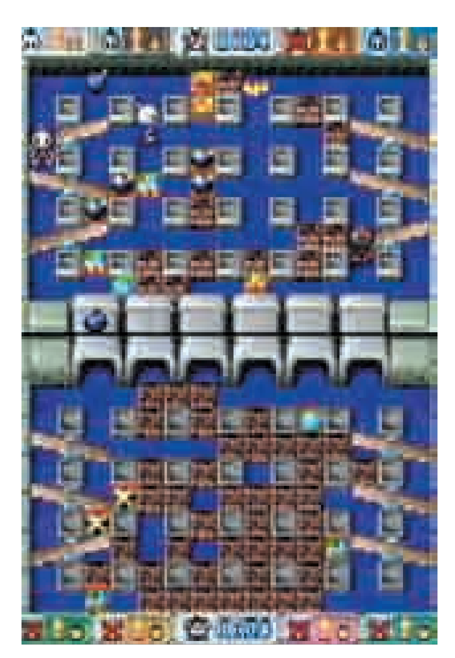
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SUPER BOMBERMAN

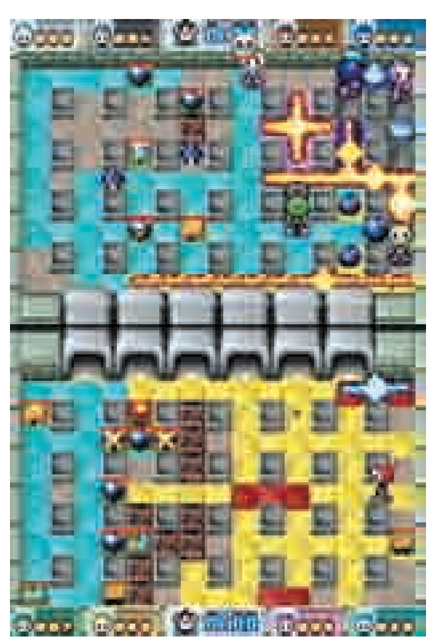
VERDICT 6/10
MULTIPLAYER JOY TARNISHED BY SILLY NIGGLES



At least it's not in 3D or anything silly, but there are just too many unnecessary, minor faults here. Poor Bombermen.



Lovely, lovely power-ups, but will you remember to tap the touch screen to activate them? Probably not. What a waste…

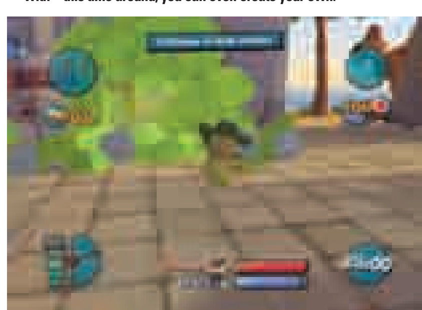


If you really want you can shout into the DS to detonate your skilfully placed bombs. You'll look like a berk, mind.


eMag



As always, there's a comprehensive arsenal of silly weapons to play with – this time around, you can even create your own.





Most weapons need to be adjusted to allow for wind conditions.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Codemasters

DEVELOPER
Team 17

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
29 July

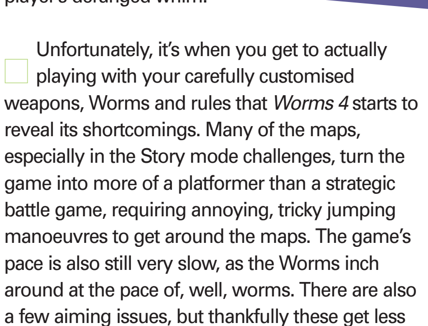
PLAYERS
1-4

WORMS 4: MAYHEM

GOOD OLD NON-THREATENING VIDEOGAME VIOLENCE

W*orms'* transition into the third dimension with *Worms 3D* was a difficult one. The 2D games are timeless classics of comedy warfare and it wasn't clear how well they would translate into 3D. Thankfully, Team 17 came out with a game that, though not up to the standard of its predecessors, preserved the spirit and humour of *Worms* without entirely destroying the strategic game dynamic. *Worms 4: Mayhem* promises to return to what the series is all about: carnage. What we have here is a recipe for total madness, with several new weapons, fully customisable Worms and game types, and even the opportunity to create your own arsenal – highlights include the Inflatable Scouser, the Fatkins Strike and various other comedy additions. But can *Worms 4* match the series' 2D masterpieces?

Mayhem offers a range of challenges, including a Story mode and various tricky 'Challenge' tasks on top of the usual match settings and the many multiplayer opportunities. The customisation, though, is what's really interesting here. Punk Worms, cowboy Worms, even robot Worms are all just a few options away if that's what you like. Players will doubtless derive much more entertainment fighting with their own custom-made teams than with the pre-made Worms. The weapon customisation is noteworthy too. Weapons can be created in a variety of different forms, from bouncing pig-shaped cluster bombs to exploding excrement. Coupled with the custom game type options, all manner of insane battle scenarios can be conceived on the player's deranged whim.



games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

XBOX LIVE: Like the Xbox release of *Worms 3D*, *Worms 4: Mayhem* has online functionality, allowing you to launch sheep and fat men at people across the world.

Unfortunately, it's when you get to actually playing with your carefully customised weapons, Worms and rules that *Worms 4* starts to reveal its shortcomings. Many of the maps, especially in the Story mode challenges, turn the game into more of a platformer than a strategic battle game, requiring annoying, tricky jumping manoeuvres to get around the maps. The game's pace is also still very slow, as the Worms inch around at the pace of, well, worms. There are also a few aiming issues, but thankfully these get less irritating as you adapt to the controls.

And so *Worms 4* is an improvement upon *Worms 3D*, and the customisation options, trademark humour and general silliness help to lift the game a bit above average. However, the series still doesn't quite work in 3D; you'd need a lot of patience and considerable tolerance to truly enjoy this game.



VERDICT 6/10

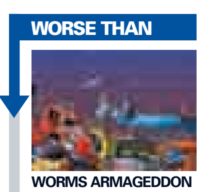
IMPERFECT, BUT REASONABLY ENTERTAINING

WORMS 3D



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



WORMS ARMAGEDDON


eMag

ADVENT RISING

HOW DO I LOATHE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Majesco

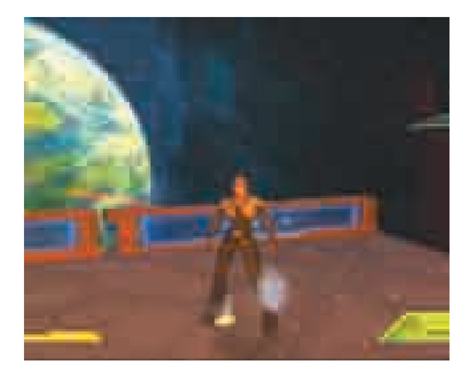
DEVELOPER
GlyphX

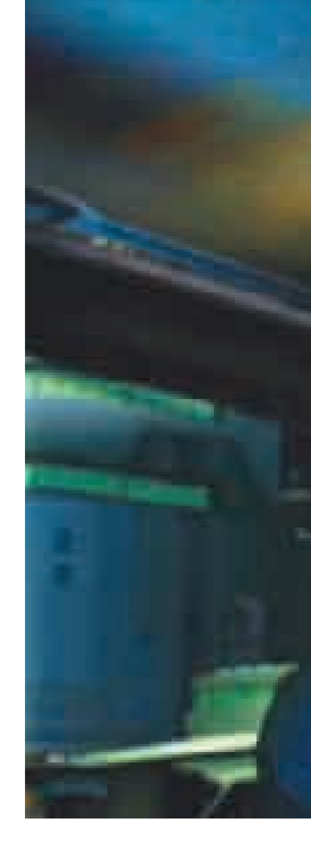
PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1







Allocating space in a magazine is a curious business. Usually, the rule is that the better or more important a game is, the more pages it gets. Games that come into the office to a rapturous reception tend to take precedence, although most of a developer or publisher's key games will command a good couple of pages at both preview and review stage regardless of quality. With reviews, however, there exists a curious exception. You see, while dodgy games are usually relegated to single-page reviews, the true horror of a select few titles can't be conveyed in just 400 words – you simply need more space because there are that many more problems that must be addressed. On which note, we'll stop wasting precious words and start explaining just how much of a nauseating shambles *Advent Rising* really is.

We may as well get the good stuff out of the way first: the music's quite good. That's all. Seriously. No other part of this wretched game even clambers above mediocre – the style is neat enough in places (except for the fact that most characters seem to be around 60 per cent leg), the story is fair (if patchily told and generic as all hell) and a few of the pre-rendered cut-scenes make you sit up and think about how nice this game could have been if GlyphX hadn't messed it up quite so spectacularly. But that's it. Then the in-game engine fires up again and you'll have a hard time just trying not to cry about just how many better ways there are to blow 50 dollars.

The number of fundamental issues with *Advent Rising* must actually be bordering on criminal. Control is as clumsy and muddled as we've ever seen, allocating the same button to several unique actions for optimum annoyance. The highlight of this veritable feast is using the right analogue stick (usually used for camera movement) to target enemies – there may never have been a more broken and confusing gameplay mechanic. Powers learned later in the game can't be used effectively with weapons, forcing you to choose one or the other. Enemies spawn at a seemingly random rate, flooding areas one time only to trickle in the next, and the camera and

Science-fiction rule #1: if it's glowing and purple, chances are you should avoid it.



WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE?

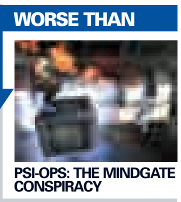
A promotion accompanying the launch of the game is almost always indicative of a company compensating for a poor quality title, so for *Advent Rising* the alarm bells should have been ringing as soon as Majesco's competition was announced. Setting up an Easter egg hunt and asking players to download and find emblems hidden in the game is a fair concept in principle but in this case it falls down by virtue of the fact that this means you'll actually have to play the game. To this end, weekly cash prizes and a grand prize of a million bucks have been offered just to get people to play the game at all. Is it even worth it? The jury's still out…

RTX: RED ROCK



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY



animation are so easily confused that leading man Gideon often looks like he's having some kind of seizure rather than doing his 'chiselled hero' bit. There's so much glitching and ropey collision detection on display that the graphics' attempts to convince us it's 1997 are pretty convincing.

Advent Rising is the single best reason we've seen so far to ban developers from playing *Halo*. Much of the game plays almost note-for-note like a level in either Bungie's original shooter or its somewhat less awesome sequel, and an identical colour palette (replace green and brown with pink and purple – ooh, very alien) is used throughout. And even when it isn't doffing its virtual (and most likely rubbish) cap in Bungie's direction, *Advent Rising* is still filling its role as the bottom-feeder of gaming. Following the crowd to the letter, there's just nothing unique or original to differentiate this from countless other forgettable sci-fi efforts and it deserves to be ridiculed just as much as the rest of them.

But the real shame is that it didn't have to be this way. Even from the opening sequence – docking with a space station near a giant alien vessel while your speakers pump out the most pompous orchestral score we've ever witnessed in a game – it's clear that there's a certain potential in most elements of the game, but the more you play the more apparent it becomes that the execution is, time and time again, absolutely diabolical. Add to this the fact that 90 per cent of the game is ugly as sin and that any manner of physics engine looks to have been removed to make extra leg room for the gangly characters and your disappointment soup will really start to boil over.

It's fair to say that playing *Advent Rising* is about as enjoyable as getting home from a hard day's work to discover you've been burgled. Massively staid, derivative and broken, it's hard to imagine exactly how the game could have been made any worse. As much as it may try not to suck at times, there's simply no excuse for a game this dreadful to be released in 2005. To be perfectly honest, if this doesn't vanish off Vivendi's release schedule shortly after bombing in the US, we'll eat our pitifully rendered and glitchy hats. But while you're waiting for this gaming car crash to be cancelled in Europe, pay a visit to the game's official website – it would appear that GlyphX and Majesco have designs on a further two games that would complete some kind of unholy trinity and bring about the end of days. Maybe. Regardless, this simply cannot be permitted to happen. Do not buy *Advent Rising* for any reason. It really is as simple as that.

FAQs

Q. SURELY IT'S NOT THAT BAD?
It really is. *Advent Rising* is a laughably unfinished mess of a game.

Q. WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT IT?
Try making a pie when all the ingredients are covered in sewage. It won't taste very nice.

Q. BUT I HEARD THE STORY WAS REALLY GOOD?
It isn't. It's predictable, generic sci-fi fare and it isn't even told particularly well.

Not even the Harlem Globetrotters have legs as out of proportion as this…

A smartly-dressed hero for an abysmally poorly drawn game. Shocking isn't the word.

gamesTM FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

RUINED: *Advent Rising* may be the single most broken game of 2005 so far.

HATE YOURSELF?: Masochists will savour this chance to scald their collective retinas.



VERDICT 2/10
ABYSMAL – AN ABSOLUTE DISGRACE



New classes help to mix things up a bit, but you still have to remember which weapon is better in each case.



As always, keeping your troops in the best of health is vital – if they die on the battlefield you lose them for the rest of the game.



No, so it doesn't look any different from the last game at first glance; clearly, Intelligent Systems knows not to fix what isn't broken.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Intelligent Systems

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
October '05
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

FIRE EMBLEM: THE SACRED STONES

RED-HOT TACTICAL RPG ACTION

It's still rare for a game to show the sacrifice inherent in warfare as well as the glory. The *Fire Emblem* games are renowned for their absorbing, lengthy storylines and well-developed characters – and for the fact that if one of your comrades dies, he or she is gone for good. The last GBA *Fire Emblem* game introduced the series to the West after six Japan-only instalments, making this the eighth game in the series. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the *Fire Emblem* formula is now down to a fine and beautiful art.

Fire Emblem: Sacred Stones, just like the last GBA *Fire Emblem* game, is a tactical RPG that has as much in common with *Advance Wars* as with a traditional 40-hour Japanese RPG. The player takes their characters into battle, selecting from among them those best suited to the task at hand, and proceeds to order them around top-down maps. Weapon types, character levels, terrain and magical techniques all play a part in battle, and the game's complexity will satisfy even the most experienced players. However, new players needn't worry about getting lost, as the game has an exquisite learning curve that introduces new techniques at exactly the right pace and leaves the player to immerse themselves in the game without worrying about the minutiae of efficacy triangles.

The lovely, meticulously animated attack sequences make a return.



games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
NEW CLASSES: When a character gets to a certain stage, you can choose a few new classes for them.
NEW MONSTERS: Several classic monsters are now ripe for killing – zombie to gargoyle and more.

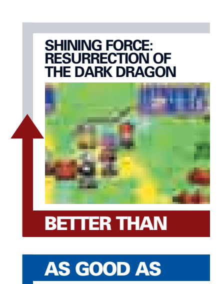
Character interaction is still of paramount importance in *Sacred Stones*, as the player persuades enemies to join them and picks up neutral characters on the way. It adds a whole new aspect to strategic battling: that Journeyman isn't just a 'unit', he's the rescued son of a man who died to defend you; that Paladin isn't just a little man on a horse, he was the King's greatest general. It's all the more effective when a character dies because you know who they were; you feel as if the little decisions you make on the battlefield have a genuine effect.

'Yes, yes,' we hear the experienced player cry, 'but what's new? What more can I expect from this instalment?' Well, the answer is: not much, really. There are a few new classes, some new enemies, a few minor tweaks and, of course, a new storyline, but the basics of the game are essentially the same. However, you can't expect a series so long-established and refined to change itself fundamentally with every new instalment. Don't be discouraged by *Sacred Stones*' similarity to the previous *Fire Emblem* game; we wouldn't change it for the world.



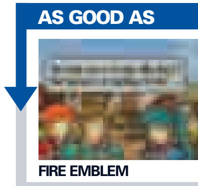
VERDICT 8/10
STILL THE SAME, BUT STILL WONDERFUL

SHINING FORCE: RESURRECTION OF THE DARK DRAGON



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

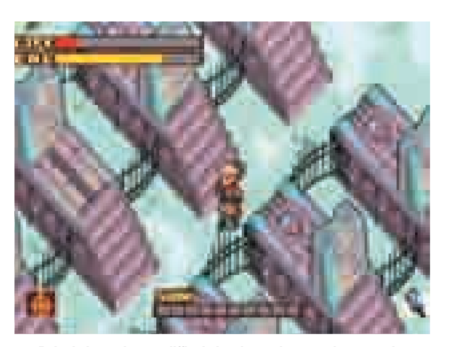


FIRE EMBLEM


eMag


Defeated bosses must be dragged around in coffins and 'purified' by the sun. Just like life? Um, not really…


As before, knocking on walls draws monsters' attention, allowing for a quick escape.


Boktai 2 is much more difficult than its predecessor, incorporating some very obscure puzzles.

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE…

BOKTAI 2: SOLAR BOY DJANGO

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

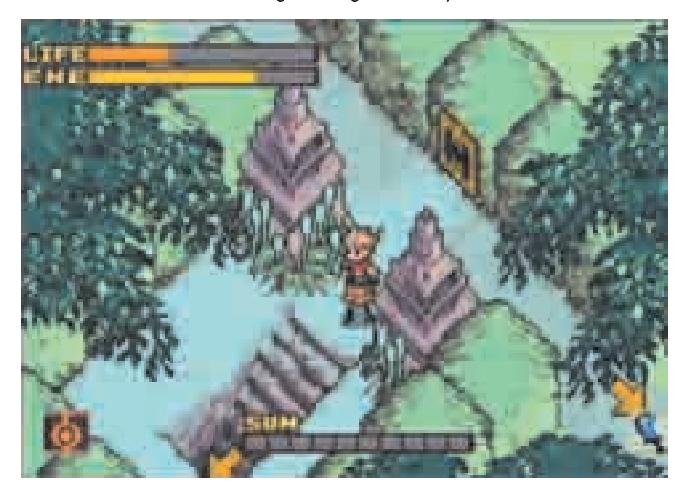
PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Last year's *Boktai* was the first thing to force us outdoors in a long time, and its sequel, *Solar Boy Django*, has officially doubled the number of games reliant on the sun. In *Boktai 2*, however, sunshine plays an even more fundamental role than before. It has a part in most puzzles and is vital for boss battles, not to mention the real-time clock that registers day and night, determining the behaviour of certain monsters.

However, *Boktai* newcomers should beware: the plot often refers to the previous game and the isometric gameplay takes a lot of getting used to, as does the sunlight concept. Players returning to *Boktai* looking for a greater challenge will be very happy with *Solar Boy Django*, but the slow start and the increased complexity of the plot, puzzles and sunlight features could easily put new players off. *Boktai 2* only gets into its stride after a few hours, by which point many confused and disgruntled gamers may have thrown it aside



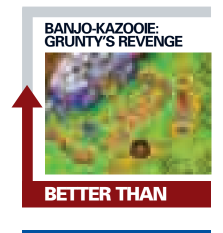
This title's gameplay is significantly different to its predecessor's. Django, the hero, loses his trademark Solar Gun early in the game and is forced to use other weapons that he can imbue with solar energy via magic skills. A new quick-select feature makes switching between weapons and skills less cumbersome than messing about with equipment screens, but combat itself can be clumsy. The isometric viewpoint makes aiming quite difficult, which leads to problems when facing multiple foes.

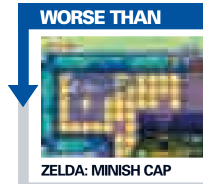
The combat isn't the only thing that's harder this time as *Boktai 2*'s general difficulty has been increased. Some puzzles are hugely obscure, especially those involving sunlight; certain pillars, platforms and other bits of scenery sometimes don't appear unless it's very sunny. Boss battles and weapon forging require a large amount of sunlight to succeed, which sadly detracts from your enjoyment of the game if you play during a typical British summer. Unless you don't mind getting stuck on a regular basis, *Boktai 2* will get very frustrating, very quickly.

That said, however, *Boktai 2* is an entertaining, innovative game. Fans of adventure games who don't find block-pushing and switch-flipping tiresome will enjoy a long-lasting challenge, as will fans of the original. Everyone else, however, should approach with caution. *Solar Boy Django* is not as accessible as the first game, but it provides the same sort of charming, challenging, puzzle-based adventure

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
SOLAR SHENANIGANS: Okay, the first *Boktai* did it too, but it's still the most distinctive thing about *Solar Boy Django*. The cart's solar sensors detect sunlight so gameplay is affected by the weather.


VERDICT 7/10
A MUST FOR FANS, BUT NOT FOR NEWCOMERS

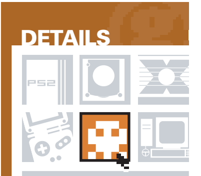
BANJO-KAZOOIE: GRUNTY'S REVENGE

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

ZELDA: MINISH CAP

SOFTLY, SOFTLY, CATCHY TERRORIST

GHOST SQUAD

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega Amusements

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£1 per play (£2 per IC memory card)

GENRE
Lightgun

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2



Many arcade games have gimmicks – motion-detecting arches, moving cabinets, monetary rewards – that are intended to draw in the crowds. Few, though, use novelties that actually enhance the genre they represent and make the game more playable, so Sega should be applauded for its innovative approach to *Ghost Squad*.

Certainly, initial impressions don't suggest anything out of the ordinary: the two hulking assault rifles on the cabinet aside, *Ghost Squad* appears to be little more than your usual lightgun blaster. However, it only takes a few instances of seeing what the game does differently to make you realise just how staid the genre has become. Some of those differences are minor; the addition of a shot selector switch to the gun, for instance (allowing you to change between single shot, burst or fully automatic) offers a new layer of strategy depending on whether a room is full of hostages, enemies or a mixture of things that need to be shot and avoided at the same time.

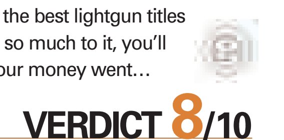
Other changes expand on ideas that Sega has attempted before, only now they're combined to add new life to the game. Split routes are nothing new, but the fact that not all of them are initially open will keep you coming back for more – by buying an Integrated Circuit memory card you can save your progress, thus opening up new routes for later games. Your score is also stored on the card, accumulating in order to increase your rank, unlock new weapons (of which there are 25, each with their own properties) and even outfits with which to customise your character.

And then there are the special events. First seen in limited form in earlier shooters like *Confidential Mission* and *Virtua Cop 3*, these variations ensure *Ghost Squad* goes all out to give you something to do other than shoot. Defusing bombs, using smoke grenades to cover your movements (which, in turn, activates your heat vision), freeing hostages and even having knife fights with similarly armed terrorists… it might all sound gimmicky, but it really helps add to the range of things the game has to offer.

While lightgun games can be limited affairs, *Ghost Squad* is anything but – in fact, Sega could release a home version tomorrow with no extra content and we'd be more than satisfied. This is easily one of the best lightgun titles on the market. With so much to it, you'll wonder where all your money went…



Despite the huge gun, much of the game is about precision – the sniper rifle, for instance, needs a steady hand.



VERDICT 8/10
SO MUCH TO DO, SO FEW BULLETS

VIRTUA COP 3



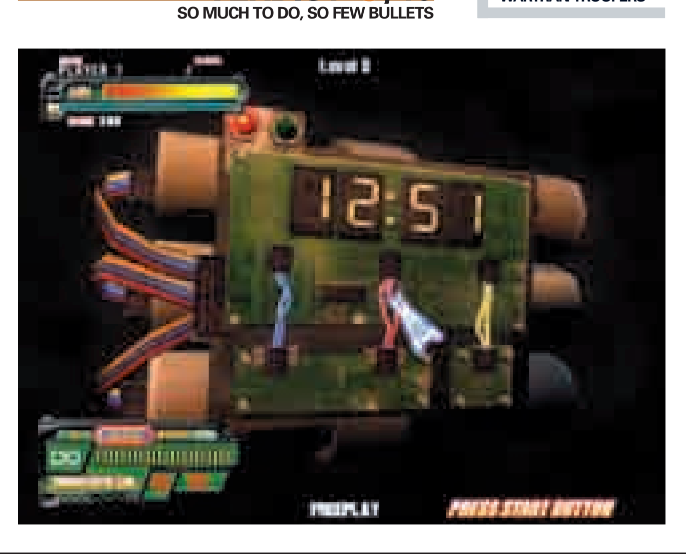
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



WARTRAN TROOPERS







It's fair to say that if your accuracy isn't up to scratch then you're not going to be getting too far.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
15 July '05

PLAYERS
1

"WE'RE IN A TIGHT SPOT"

KILLER7

It's always nice to have a good laugh, but there are many different forms of laughter. Possibly the most laughed-at thing in the world is someone else's misfortune. It's cruel, but for some reason we find it incredibly funny. Jeremy Beadle managed to make a career out of it, and he was rubbish. With this in mind, we think we may have found the funniest thing known to man – our faces when the nth copy of the aptly titled 'Generic Game 3' lands upon our cluttered desks. 'I swear I played this last year,' you'll hear us cry. 'Only I was controlling a bear then, not a really fast otter.' And, of course, collecting a hundred somethings is always fun.

Fortunately, there are companies that are striving to bring us something that little bit different and Capcom, after an impressive flurry of superb titles over the last year, has had a stab at providing just that. *killer7* is a title that's been hovering around for a long while. Previews have been popping up all over the place and the much talked about on-rails control method and the seven playable personalities contained within one man are all common knowledge now. It sounded insane, it looked over-stylised and many had the title judged months ago. It's here now though, and it's obvious that Capcom is fated to continue its winning streak – we like *killer7* very much indeed.

Even the general gist of the story is quite complicated, so we won't bother to attempt an explanation. Between the fancy looking cut-scenes, the helpful spirits of the dead and the anime-style clips that have been inserted at regular intervals the story will be explained in

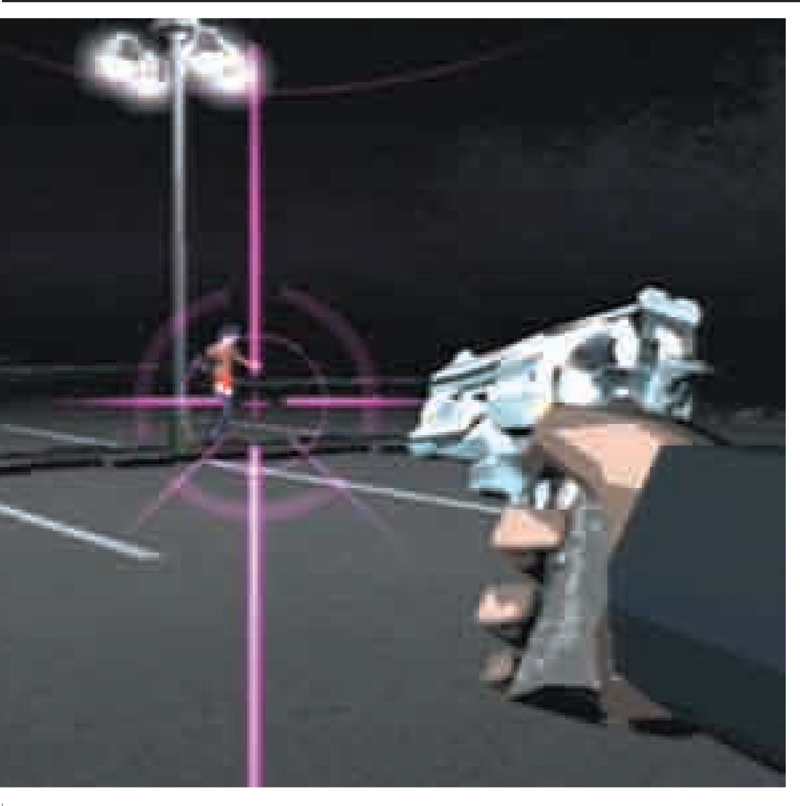


Men, women, wrestlers – they're all in our lead guy's head.



It was all starting to make a little more sense – then The HandsomeMen turned up.







"WHAT REALLY SELLS THIS GAME IS ITS VERSATILITY AND INSISTENCE ON PROVIDING SOMETHING NEW EVERY STEP OF THE WAY"

great depth and, assuming you take the time to track down some of the information, is fairly understandable eventually. We say eventually, as the first half of the game provides such a small trickle of information you do feel that you're a bit lost in places, and it's only once you've moved onto the second disc that things start making any sense. It's intriguing though, and once again provides the movie-like game experience of which Japanese development teams seem so fond.

What really sells this game is its versatility and insistence on providing something new every step of the way. You think you've seen everything the game has? Unless you completed it several times, you haven't. It's that simple. The bosses alone force you to think way outside of the big gaming box that's currently full of hiding in shadows and hitting attack buttons until an enemy stops blocking, and furnish you with some of the most memorable end-of-level encounters since the bosses in *Metal Gear*. Sure, there's a couple of 'I shoot and you die' encounters in there, but after the western-style showdown with Dan's nemesis Curtis and the frankly awesome killer7 vs The HandsomeMen battle (yes, it is as good as it sounds) you really start to appreciate what Capcom has managed to achieve with the title.

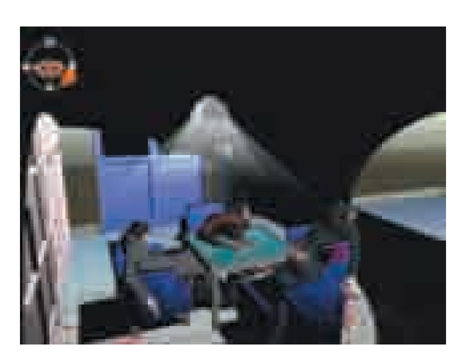
In many ways, the inclusion of these different sections was essential if *killer7* was going to make any kind of impression. The quirky on-rails gameplay doesn't lend itself to any kind of tactical element when it comes to dealing with enemies. You can't move, can't dodge and it's always going to be a case of shooting different things in certain orders in order to succeed. Constraining yourself in this way was necessary to provide the gameplay that Capcom intended for the title, but to succeed in providing variation and finding so many different ways around what is essentially the key gameplay element that the development team imposed upon itself is impressive – and the fact that it still manages to flow seamlessly and work so well is even more so.

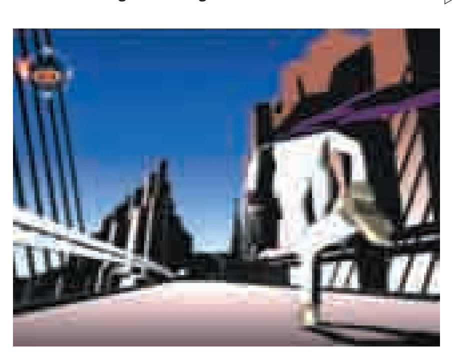
Even the term 'on-rails' is a little misleading. It suggests a set route through a level and implies a lack of exploration, but this isn't the case. Although holding down a button will see

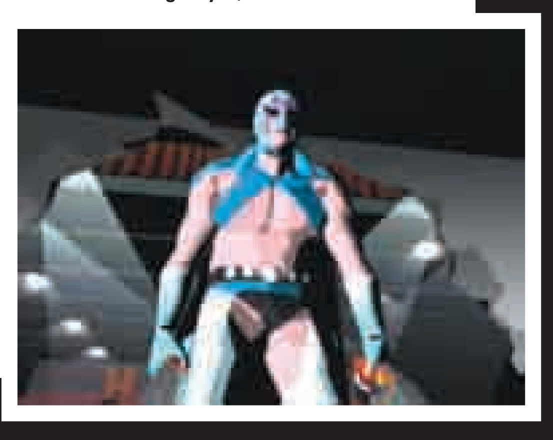


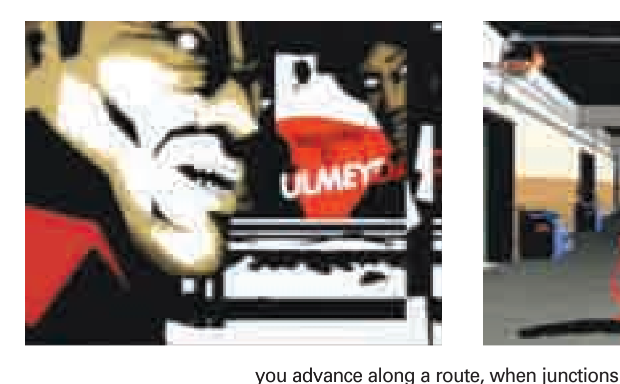
SUITS YOU

Something that becomes obvious as you progress is that the developer is particularly fond of the personality that is wrestler MASK DE Smith. Although all the characters change their outfits between levels and both Dan and Garcian get new weapons, it's the wrestler that has received all the attention and has, frankly, been spoilt rotten. As well as having five different shells available for his guns, he can also find several new outfits if you take the time to explore. These costumes not only allow him to look that little bit more like a badass wrestler-type, but also cause his abilities to soar and, eventually, do away with his need to reload. The game may be tough, but with rewards such as this waiting for you, it's well worth the effort.













you advance along a route, when junctions appear you have to choose your path. You can backtrack, explore tucked-away areas, and – as long as you choose to do it early enough – run away from enemies that are too much for an under-enhanced character (then use the blood you've collected to boost your stats before returning). Actually, without adequate care, it's easy to miss pieces of kit and vital clues – a mistake that can cost you dearly in a game of this type. Although puzzles are relatively simple, characters you meet may well have passwords printed on their shirts and not paying attention to innocent-looking posters can cause much grief when quizzed on their appearance later on.

This all sounds great, but the game isn't without its faults. Occasionally, the sparkling 'sweet spot' that allows you to take enemies down with one well-aimed hit is obscured by an overlapping body part or slice of misplaced cel-shading, making an already difficult situation nigh-on impossible. Also, with some enemies only being vulnerable to one of your characters, there are occasionally times when a huge amount of switching is required simply to walk along a section of street. These instances can be frustrating, but the key complaint that the game is guaranteed to attract concerns its high difficulty level.

Even with the in-game map showing exactly where character abilities should be used and what items to use in each situation, the reflexes needed to pass some of the later missions are insane, and with some enemies being able to kill

FAQs

Q. IS IT REALLY THAT DIFFICULT?
Well, it's more of a case of adjusting existing skills really. Pretty tough, though.

Q. WHAT'S THE STORY LIKE?
Complicated and confusing. We think we understand it. Just.

Q. GOOD THEN?
Definitely, but there'll be plenty of people who tell you otherwise. These people are wrong.

"PEOPLE WHO DISMISS THIS TITLE AFTER HALF AN HOUR BECAUSE IT'S 'TRYING TOO HARD' WILL MISS OUT ON ONE OF THE MOST UNIQUE AND REWARDING GAMING EXPERIENCES IN YEARS"

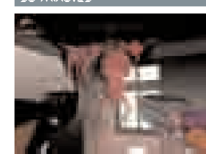


Thanks to the control method, you'll not have to weave through all these flames on your own. Probably just as well – the game's plenty tough without that sort of thing.

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

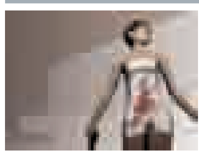
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

30 MINUTES



You'll have been blown up a lot and probably be quite annoyed. We wouldn't be surprised if you despise the game. Keep at it. You're very wrong.

2 HOURS



Your skills will have adjusted by now and the first boss should be in your sights. Now you'll start to appreciate what Capcom has achieved here.

7 DAYS



If you've persevered then you should have beaten the game for the first time and discovered some of the secrets. See, we told you it was good. You should listen to us…



Zombie businessmen are out to make your life hell as per usual – that's a very nice tie, though.

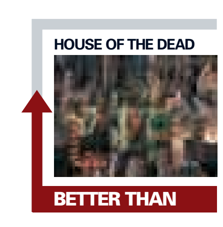


Travis will turn up occasionally and fill you in on important plot points. Not by singing, thankfully.

your character instantly from a distance (unless you manage to shoot a tiny spot on its forehead inside the strict five-second time limit, of course) *killer7* is bound to cause plenty of tears. Situations like this put us in mind of the many lightgun games where bosses can only be laid to rest with extremely accurate yet extremely fast shooting abilities. It was hard enough with a gun; on a pad it's extremely harsh. This alone is where many will put down the pad, blame a 'poor control system' for their lack of skill and reach for something less taxing – say, *Lego Star Wars*.

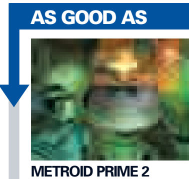
And that's a shame. Between gamers' potential lack of patience and the people needlessly dismissing the title after half an hour simply because it's 'trying too hard', many are going to miss out on one of the most unique and rewarding gaming experiences of the last few years. Probably the same people who spend their time whining about the lack of innovation in games today, actually. Don't be one of these people and don't listen to what your friend read on the internet the other day. Buy *killer7*, play it and enjoy it. You'll thank us in the end.

HOUSE OF THE DEAD



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



METROID PRIME 2



VERDICT 9/10

ANOTHER KILLER TITLE FROM CAPCOM



GAME ON

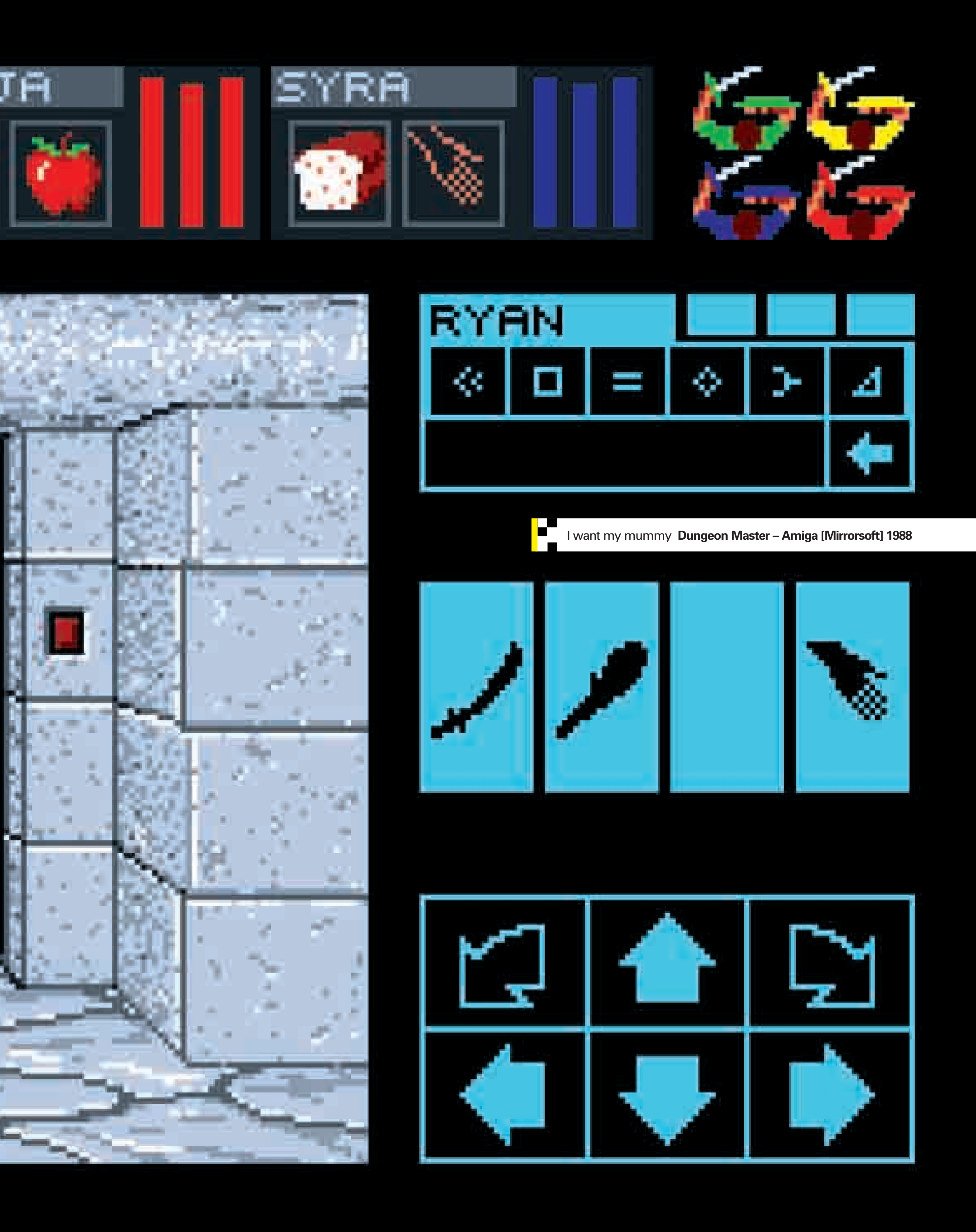
Single-player adventure games aren't generally known for their replay value. Once you've beaten them on the standard difficulty there's usually very little on offer other than a slightly harder version of the game you've just played. This isn't the case with *killer7*. Upon completion you'll unlock a whole new personality to control, which easily enhances the game enough to warrant another play through.

We won't reveal who this other personality is, as we wouldn't want to spoil the surprise, but the character is a fine addition to the team. This new character and boosted difficulty level means that killer8 is a more than adequate unlockable – and to think we expected a 'killer7 Must Die' mode…



We suspect that nobody will ever understand why security cameras have the ability to change your personality without you wanting them to – they just do.


RYAN
ZED



I want my mummy **Dungeon Master – Amiga [Mirrorsoft] 1988**


eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.34 JULY 2005
00p
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
POETRY IN MOTION
A look back at the wondrous world of Panzer Dragoon
SPECTRUM ZX81
CLASSIC MACHINE LOOKBACK
SHADOW OF THE BEAST – AN IDEAL REMAKE?
CLIFF JOHNSON
WHY THE PUZZLE KING LOVES TO HEAR THREE LITTLE WORDS
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT, BUYERS' GUIDE, RETRO CONTACT, GREAT GAMING MOMENT AND MORE...

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Amazingly, I'd never played *Panzer Dragoon Saga* until last month. I've owned the game a few times but always managed to sell it on without ever touching it. Even receiving the first disc with *Sega Saturn Magazine* (surely the greatest giveaway in magazine history?) couldn't persuade me to continue on to that second disc.

Luckily, the arrival of Jones Jr II has provided me with plenty of free time in the evenings (I've designed an ingenious device that allows me to rock her to sleep with my right foot) so I decided to finally give *Saga* a whirl.

One purchase later – thank you, eBay – and it was time to take flight. My first reaction upon playing was to ask myself why it had taken me so long to play this amazing game; my second was to entrust Jones Jr II to my wife so I could really get lost in the game without having to worry about keeping that right foot moving.

There's always something to discover with retro gaming, no matter how much of an expert you may think you are. And that's what makes the whole experience so enjoyable. While we try to cover some popular classics in the Retro section, sometimes we hope that we'll bring to your attention something you'd never tried before, and that you may even grow to love…



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

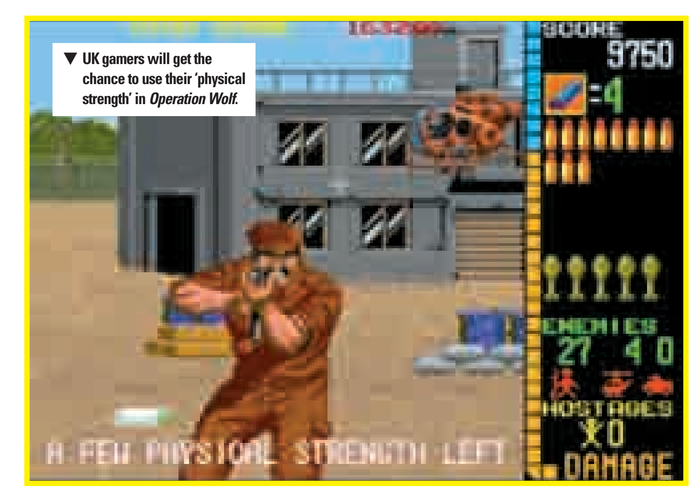
TAITO TAKES TWO

TAITO REVEALS TWO MORE RETRO COMPILATIONS

Crikey, Taito's first collection of retro games – *Taito Memories Volume 1* – isn't even in the shops yet, but the company has already announced two more compilations.

Taito Memories Volume 2 is looking just as good as the first instalment in the series and features several classic Taito titles that were expected to appear on the first disc. Among the 24 titles set to appear on *Volume 2* are *The New Zealand Story*, *Qix*, *Space Invaders*, *Puzzle Bobble 2*, *RayStorm*, *Legend Of Kage* and *Elevator Action* – a very wide selection that should cater to a variety of tastes.

Taito Memories Volume 1, which was announced some time ago, will be available in Japan from 28 July and contains over 20 classic titles. *Elevator Action Returns*, *Metal Black*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Rastan Saga* and *Darius Gaiden* are just a few of the games available and the collection is bound to prove a massive hit with retro fans.

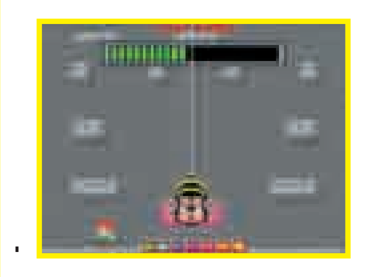


▼ UK gamers will get the chance to use their 'physical strength' in *Operation Wolf.*

While both compilations contain a range of classic titles, eager Japanese gamers may be disappointed to learn that *Rainbow Islands* and several other high-profile games are nowhere to be seen. Luckily, it would appear that it's us Brits who are the fortunate ones, as a third Taito compilation – *Taito Legends* – is due in the UK this September for Xbox, PlayStation2 and PC and contains the elusive *Rainbow Islands* and many other titles that won't be appearing on the Japanese compilations.

Operation Wolf, *Zoo Keeper*, *Continental Circus*, *Bubble Symphony*, *Space Gun* and *Phoenix* are just a few of the games that are exclusive to the UK release (check the boxout for a full list of included titles), and with a price of under £20 we're expecting this to be just as popular as the multi-volume *Midway Treasures* range.

What with the *Capcom Classics Collection*, *Midway Treasures 3* and this all-new Taito compilation to look forward to, we're not going to have enough time to play any of our other retro titles, let alone new ones.



TAITO LEGENDS

The Complete List

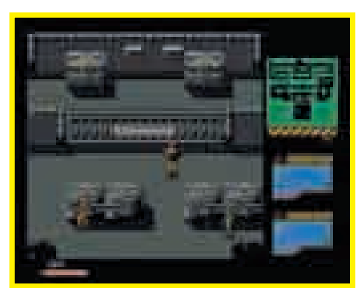
Space Invaders • Phoenix • Space Invaders Part II • Colony 7 • Electric Yo-Yo • Jungle Hunt • Zoo Keeper • Elevator Action • Great Swordsman • Sea Fighter Poseidon • Bubble Bobble • Gladiator • Scramble Formation • Excises • Plump Pop • Operation Wolf • Rainbow Islands • Rastan • Super Qix • The New Zealand Story • Operation Thunderbolt • Battle Shark • Continental Circus • Plotting • Volfied • Aqua Jack • Ninja Kids • Space Gun • ThunderFox • Double Axle • Dungeon Magic • Rayforce • Tube It • Bubble Symphony • Darius Gaiden • Pop 'N' Pop

GAMING NEWS

Snake gears up

CLASSIC MSX GAMES TO BE RELEASED ON PS2

Regular readers will know that we hold the original *Metal Gear* games in very high regard. Sadly, MSXs aren't always easy to get hold of so it would cost a small fortune to get *Metal Gear 2*. And then there's the fact that being fluent in Japanese would help. So what's a Snake fan to do?



Well, Konami has decided it's time to bring Snake's MSX antics to the masses. Both *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2* will be included as extras when *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* is released on PS2. Announced at E3, *Subsistence* is a follow-up to the recent *Snake Eater*, and while *Metal Gear* did appear on the NES, the MSX version was vastly superior, so it's great to see Konami releasing these titles outside Japan.

Sonic's Back

SEGA ANNOUNCES A GEM OF A COLLECTION

Although we enjoyed *Sonic Mega Collection Plus* we were a bit miffed by the omission of certain titles. But Sega has now announced a second Sonic compilation that's bound to have fans salivating like rabid hedgehogs. Initially available for the GameCube, *Sonic Gems Collection* is due to contain *Sonic R*, a PC port of the Saturn racer; *Sonic The Fighters*, an arcade title that's never appeared on a home machine; and the excellent *Sonic CD*. Sega is also including the Game Gear titles that appeared on the PS2 and Xbox compilations.

There'll be some secret unlockables but those hoping to find *NiGHTS* may be disappointed – the difficulty of a true Saturn port means it may be little more than a pipe dream. More likely inclusions would be *Chaotix* and the excellent *SegaSonic*.

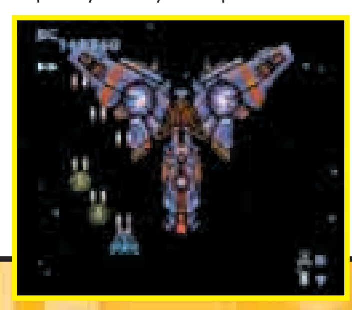
PSP+Emulation=Love

EMULATION ON SONY'S HANDHELD STEPS UP A GEAR

Things have been heating up on the PSP emulation scene recently. A few weeks ago there were just two PSP emulators available for the NES and Game Boy Color. Now the number has shot up to an astonishing 11 and shows no sign of slowing down.

The PC Engine, SNES, Mega Drive, Sega Master System, Game Gear, MSX and Neo-Geo CD are just a few of the machines that have been emulated, and while many of them are far from perfect it's still impressive to see how quickly things are progressing. One interesting side effect of the new emulators is that they are starting to push up the price of the original Japanese PSPs, as newer models (including US machines) feature firmware that prohibits the use of emulators.

However, the persistence of hackers means it's only a matter of time before this new firmware is cracked and in the meantime eager coders will continue to chip away at Sony's new portable.



Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events…

AUGUST '05

CGE UK

Date: 13 August **Location:** Fairfield Halls, Croydon
Price: Adults (14+) – £10, Child (6-13) – £7.50, Child (under 6) – Free
After the success of last year's event, we've been told that this year's CGE UK is going to be even bigger. Look out for guest appearances from Matthew Smith, Archer Maclean, Jeff Minter and several ex-Ocean staff. And that's just for starters….

Classic Gaming Expo (CGE)
Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA
Last year's event was attended by none other than Konami and Midway and proved to be a huge success. As the expo prepares to enter its eighth year, you can be sure that 2005's event will be even better.

SEPTEMBER '05

Jagfest '05
Date: TBC **Location:** TBC **Price:** TBC
Details are still sketchy at the moment, but we have been made aware that Jagfest UK will be returning this year. The event has been running for several years now and has slowly been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

Namco Museum 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Namco **Price:** TBC
The Xbox and PlayStation2 get their own dose of old-school arcade action with this collection of 14 Namco titles. The likes of *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Pole Position* will jostle for space with *Rolling Thunder* and *Galaga*.

Capcom Classics Collection
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBC
Another 'best-of' retro compilation, this time from Capcom. Some arguably fine titles are included (*1942*, *Street Fighter II*, *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*) but will a few extra features make this worth a purchase?

OCTOBER '05

Sega Classics Collection
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC
Sega's latest compilation features remakes of many of its classic arcade games and is available for PS2. *Golden Axe*, *OutRun*, *Space Harrier* and *Columns* are just a few of the games on offer.

Midway Arcade Treasures 3
Date: TBC **Publisher:** Midway **Price:** TBC
Keen to try something new, Midway's third compilation has a racing theme and features the likes of *Hydro Thunder*, *S.T.U.N. Runner* and *Badlands*. Let's just hope *Hydro Thunder* is the original arcade game and not the mediocre PlayStation version.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE



THE DARK EYE

QUOTH THE RAVEN, NEVERMORE

Release: 1996
Format: PC/Macintosh
Publisher: Time Warner Interactive
Developer: Inscape

Remember the days of the 'interactive movie' – a buzz phrase for games that were jam-packed with FMV and not much else? We certainly do, if only for the number of times we threw our hands up in despair as developers churned them out non-stop. But, amid the mire of disappointment, there were occasional glimmers of light; games like *The Dark Eye* that adapted the idea into something that managed to both delight and horrify – in a good way, of course.

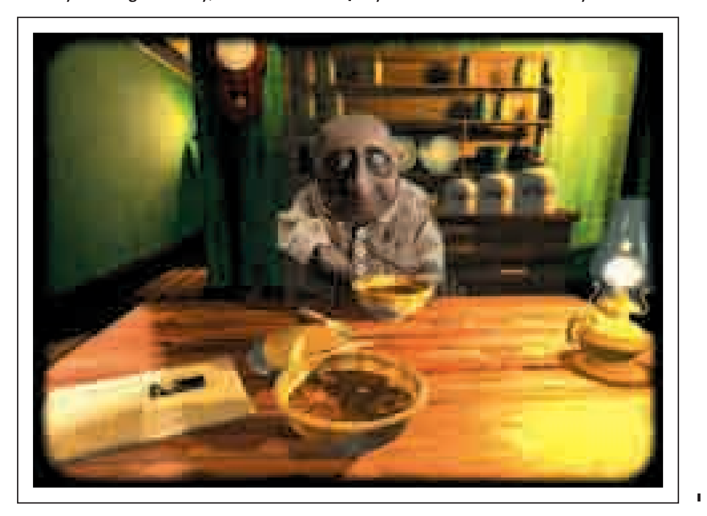
Interestingly, *The Dark Eye* isn't a game in the conventional sense – there are no puzzles to solve, enemies to slay or bosses to defeat. While that might sound odd and even a little dull, it's the story, or rather stories, that help prevent this from being the case. Effectively an interactive storybook, it gathers together three tales by poet and horror writer Edgar Allen Poe (*Berenice*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Cask Of Amantillado*) before bundling them all together under the guise of a single plot.

Much as in games like *Myst* or *7th Guest*, the action is split between moving around through rendered backgrounds (using the typical severed hand pointer that comes to life when you move it over objects you can use or locations you can move to) and animated cut-scenes that expand the overall story. As you'd expect given the subject matter, this all-encompassing plot is suitably murky, focusing on your character visiting their family home and having nightmares that are, in fact, branches of the various stories. It's dark, brooding and even slightly unsettling – especially since the cut-scenes are all played out through a mixture of quality voice acting and creepy claymation.

So far, so good then; however, it's when you start moving between the various story branches that you realise why this is a 'game' in inverted commas. Although you're free to go where you like, actually advancing the story involves finding the right object with which to interact… and that's it. No puzzles, no complex logic process (aside from occasionally figuring out exactly how to interact with an item), just a quick click, stroke or general movement and you're away. Sounds rubbish, doesn't it? Well, it's not – the gripping stories are so macabre and well integrated you're compelled to want to see what happens next.

The fact that you play each of the three stories from two different angles (as perpetrator and victim respectively) adds to the terror, as you can often predict what's about to happen even though you can't actually stop it. It's genuinely frightening to know that your character could be killed at any moment just to further the story, and that's the hook on which *The Dark Eye* hangs.

True, those without knowledge of the books might find themselves slightly confused as to what to do (you'll often find yourself stumbling across the answer instead of working it out) but even so, *The Dark Eye* is a hugely compelling 'game' that deserves a look. Check out www.the-underdogs.org if you fancy getting hold of it.



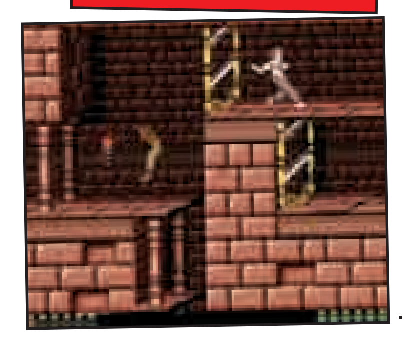


▼ That was the last time he put shards of glass in his gloves for safekeeping…



THE MIRROR PRINCE – PRINCE OF PERSIA

Release: 1989
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Broderbund
Developer: Jordan Mechner



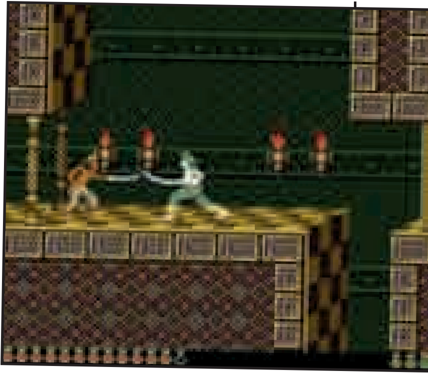
Alright, so perhaps many of you wouldn't exactly class the creation and then subsequent 'destruction' of the Prince's alter-ego as a boss fight in conventional terms. Even so, there really was nothing like it back in 1989 and it's one of those interesting ideas that you just can't forget playing for the first time.

At a certain point in the game (the level varies depending on which version of the game you're playing), you'll find yourself standing face to face with a large mirror. As it's the only thing between you and the exit leading to the next stage, you have to find a way through… but how?

Unfortunately, there's no way to smash it but if you take a good long run-up and leap towards the glass you'll pass straight through – creating a strange doppelganger and reducing your life to nearly zero in the process. A few seconds later and your double runs off, leaving you to carry on regardless.

Your reflection subsequently pops up to bother you a couple of times during the rest of your adventure (stepping on switches and drinking potions when you least expect it) until, finally, you come face to face with him.

Swords drawn, it's a fight to the death… or rather, both your deaths, considering every strike on him hurts you. The answer? Make love, not war – put your sword away and he does the same, leaving the doorway open for a blissful reunion. Honestly, you wouldn't believe how much hair we lost trying to work that one out…



▲ As ever, fighting isn't the answer. Put your sword away and walk away. He's not worth it…

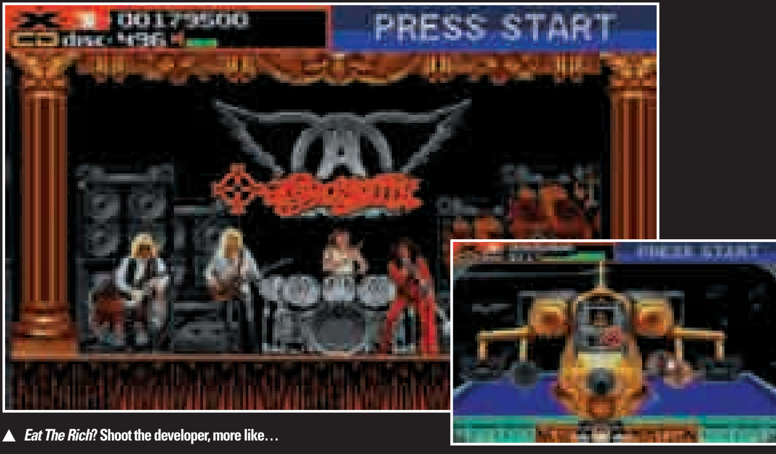
Worst LICENCE EVER

Licensed games have a history of being at the lower end of the shoddy scale, but some manage to out-shoddy even the lamest and most tenuous titles…

REVOLUTION X

Release: 1994 ● **Format:** Arcade, Various Home Systems ● **Publisher:** Acclaim ● **Developer:** Midway (Arcade)

We like Aerosmith – really we do. But even our enjoyment of their Eighties/Nineties brand of poodle rock is marred by something like *Revolution X*, an absolute mess of a game proving that videogames and rock stars don't mix. The concept behind it is bad enough (rescue the kidnapped members of Aerosmith from the evil New Order Nation – which is led by leather dominatrix Helga – using music as your weapon… yeah, right) but when you realise that the only way to do this is to plough through the most arduous on-rails blaster imaginable, it all becomes a bit much.



▲ *Eat The Rich*? Shoot the developer, more like…

There's just so much wrong with it, it's hard to know where to begin. Maybe it's that all the enemies look the same, or that their animation is limited to only a handful of frames. It could be that you can't avoid being hit, even if you manage to fend off most of the enemies – there are just so many of them, you're guaranteed to die over and over. Multiple routes through levels that don't actually make any difference, stupidly unfair bosses, dire midi versions of Aerosmith hits like *Eat The Rich* and *Walk This Way*… everything about this game is absolutely atrocious. Exactly why Steven Tyler and friends agreed to put their names to this shambles isn't clear, but if we had a time machine then believe us, it'd be the first thing we'd go back and change.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

B•A•R•B•A•R•I•A•N: T•H•E U•L•T•I•M•A•T•E W•A•R•R•I•O•R

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month it's the 8-bit computer versions of the superb slash-'em-up Barbarian.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: Considering the size of the sprites in *Barbarian,* we were a little concerned about how they'd look on the C64; fortunately, we needn't have worried. While they're a little chunkier than the Amstrad sprites, the quality is still very good. Throw in some detailed backgrounds and impressive animation and you're left with a surprisingly good looking game.

SPECTRUM: The first thing you notice about the Spectrum version is just how impressive it looks. Yes, the lack of colour for the main fighters is a letdown, but they're very well detailed, boast excellent animation and are a lot more imposing than their 8-bit counterparts. The backgrounds look rather weak, but this is still impressive.

AMSTRAD: Bright, sharp colours, superb animation and brilliantly detailed sprites immediately give the Amstrad the edge over its competitors. The vibrant colours are a world away from the dull look of the Spectrum game and there's hardly any of the chunkiness that's evident in the C64 version.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Keep listening to Richard Joseph's excellent soundtrack because while it sounds like it's going into an early loop, it's actually quite a complex and enjoyable tune. The latter half of the track is rather eerie, and while it's not the best ever C64 tune it knocks its competitors into a cocked hat.

SPECTRUM: While the Spectrum managed to impress with its detailed sprites, its sound chip doesn't enjoy the same success. The main theme, while essentially similar to its peers, sounds like it's been hammered out on an early mobile phone and has none of the punch of the Amstrad and C64 versions. Spot effects are also rather twee and don't sit well with the violent in-game action.

AMSTRAD: Although the Amstrad beat its C64 counterpart in the visual stakes, it's not as close a match when it comes to sound. The Amstrad manages to blow away the inferior Spectrum tune, but it doesn't have the impact of the C64 track. Still, at least the spot effects are resoundingly chunky…

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: Whether you're playing with a joystick or keys, *Barbarian* remains an excellent title. Sure, the responsiveness can be iffy, but this remains one of the great fantasy fighters on the C64. The controls are nice and tight, and collision detection is pretty much spot on. If only it was a little faster…

SPECTRUM: Maybe we're getting myopic, but the Spectrum version's collision detection seems a lot more hit and miss (pun intended) than we remember. We can appreciate that taking somebody's head off isn't going to be the easiest of tasks, but slicing clean through only for your opponent to suffer little more than a small nick can't be right. Sadly, these glitches are frequent and mar an otherwise playable game.

AMSTRAD: There's very little difference between the Amstrad and C64 versions of *Barbarian.* Both feature solid controls, the collision detection is sound, and beheading opponents is a satisfying achievement. After extensive play we really can't see any differences between them, so we've got a dead heat in this round.

WINNER: AMSTRAD/C64
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

AND THE WINNER IS…

AMSTRAD

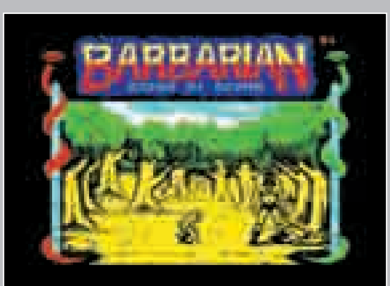
No doubt loyal Spectrum owners will be incensed to see the Amstrad walk away with yet another win, but it's thoroughly deserved. Overall there was little to distinguish between Amstrad and Commodore's machines, but the superior visuals of the Amstrad just managed to clinch it.



Face it – the Amstrad version (above) looks so much better.



Poor Spectrum (below) – a sorry third place for a lame game.





BARBARIAN (Various Home Systems) Palace Software, 1987 – Original UK advertisement

MACHINE SPECS

PROCESSOR: NEC Z80 clone at 3.25Mhz
LAUNCH PRICE: £79.95 (kit) or £99.95 (built)
MEMORY: 1K RAM upgradeable to 16K. Third-party RAM packs added up to 64K and allowed piggy-backing, giving the machine as much memory as you could afford.
SOUND: No natural sound output, though manipulating the save routine and wiring the EAR socket to a speaker could produce a few noises. Some third parties provided an upgrade that would give the ZX81 sound capabilities.
GRAPHICS: 32x24 character matrix with graphics symbols. No lower-case letters. 1-bit (black and white) colour attribute with a 64x48 quarter-block plotable resolution. By interrupting the screen output routine it was possible to simulate a 256x192 resolution and have hi-resolution animated graphics.





SINCLAIR ZX81

During the late Seventies, home computing hadn't really taken off. Many 'microcomputers' sold in the UK came in kit form, while ready-made machines, most of which hailed from the US, were beyond the average budget. So there was a great chance for microcomputers to emerge as educational or small-business tools.

Step forward Clive Sinclair, a Cambridge-based inventor who saw great potential in this growing market. He predicted that computers would become so commonplace that not owning one would one day be like a household without a TV or washing machine, but he realised that such machines needed to be affordable and user-friendly. With foresight like that, he must be a bookie's nightmare…

MACHINES FOR THE MASSES

Clive Sinclair's first foray into the microcomputer market (with the company Science of Cambridge Ltd) was the MK 14, a simple computer kit launched in 1978 that helped to capture the hobbyist end of the market. This machine suffered from many bugs and didn't sell in vast numbers, but it put Sinclair on the path to start a home computer revolution in the UK.

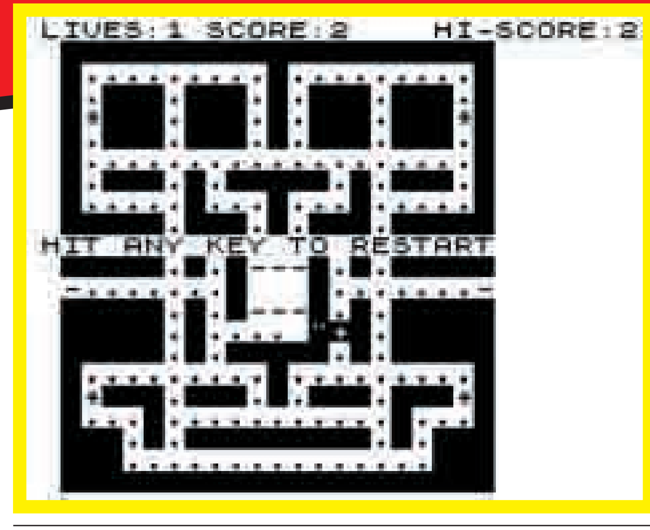
The company then started work on a new machine that could be used with any standard TV and cassette player for storage – the ZX80. This machine was available as a kit or a finished unit, used just 21 chips and and cost under £100 – a remarkable feat for the time. None of the established competition could compete on price, but the machine had many compromises to keep costs low. It had a touch-sensitive membrane keyboard, a 4K ROM that had a limited BASIC language (that could only do integer mathematics), low-resolution graphics at 64x48 quarter-blocks and 1-bit (black and white) colour attributes, and no sound. To top it all, it couldn't display ▶



hine

MEET THE MACHINE THAT LAUNCHED A THOUSAND GAMING ADDICTIONS AND MORE THAN A FEW COMPUTING CAREERS – SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR'S ZX81…

Retro Machine



▲ Whatever you think, this definitely isn't *Pac-Man*. That's a completely different game. Oh yes.

or update a static screen while it was processing information, so for every calculation or key press (for instance) the screen would switch off to perform the task and switch back on again afterwards. This would ultimately make the ZX80 unsuitable for gaming, though there were some crude attempts at *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* clones.

Despite the ZX80's limitations, the press were broadly positive about it, as was anyone who was mildly curious about microcomputers (becoming known as 'personal' or 'home' computers) due to its affordable price. In order to maintain momentum, Sinclair needed a new machine that would address the shortcomings of the ZX80. Work continued at the company (now called Sinclair Research Ltd) and in March 1981, Sinclair launched the ZX81.

"THE SPECTRUM'S MONSTER MAZE IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS DOOM FOR THE PC"

The ZX81 in many ways marked another step forward, while still having many of the ZX80's cost-cutting quirks such as the touch-sensitive membrane keyboard, no natural sound output and low-resolution 1-bit graphics. The component count was down to just three parts (excluding RAM), and so was the cost – a mere £69.95 for a complete unit, or £49.95 for the kit. Problems with the screen were sorted out by processing any instructions outside the screen area, meaning that it was always on unless the user chose to switch it off. For those who had bought a ZX80, an 8K ROM upgrade was available, though upgrading would not make it completely compatible with the ZX81.

The April 1981 edition of *Computing Today* reported "Sinclair does it again", focusing on the machine's remarkably low chip count. In the June edition, when it carried a full review of the system, it declared "What the ZX80 did for thousands I'm sure the ZX81 will do for many more", summarising perfectly by recommending the ZX81 "to any intending purchaser – it is very good value for money. It does not have the facilities one would require for a business machine, but anyone wanting to learn what a computer can do, without spending a fair amount of money, should seriously consider one." Britain's computer revolution had begun, thanks to Clive Sinclair's unsophisticated yet great machine.

A-MAZE-MENT

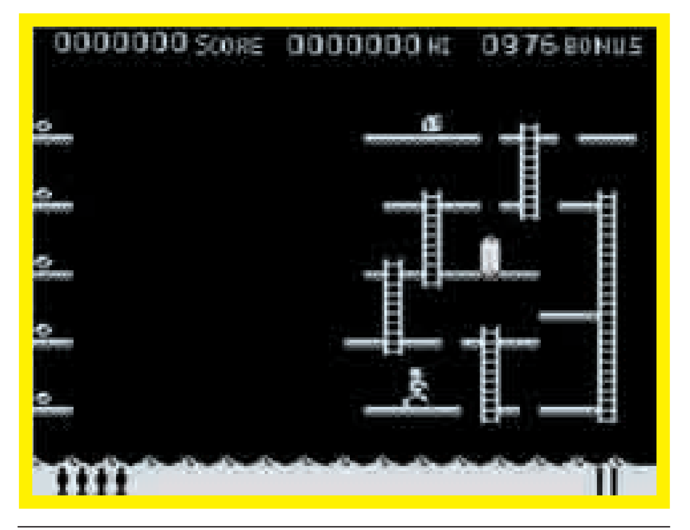
Clive Sinclair had intended his computers to be educational tools, but to his bemusement a limited number of entertainment-based titles had been attempted on the ZX80. With the ZX81's improvements, this was bound to increase, not least because many of the computing magazines of the time carried regular BASIC listings that were often crude games which encouraged many to write their own creations.

Although some early games weren't too hot, the odd gem would occasionally appear. One of the most outstanding was *Monster Maze*, a first-person perspective game released in the same year as the machine. It required the player to escape a maze that housed a hungry T-Rex that would be on the lookout for a tasty morsel. Finding the exit without falling prey to the dinosaur was time-consuming and addictive. *Monster Maze* is today acknowledged as one of the milestones in gaming history and is arguably as important as *Doom* for the PC.

Perhaps an even more impressive feat was *1K Chess* by Artic Computing. John Gilbert, staff writer for *Sinclair User*, summed up this game perfectly in the March 1983 issue when he said, "It takes some technical wizardry to squeeze this kind of game into the unexpanded ZX81." Not only did the game impress Gilbert, it proved popular with the punters as well, as it was a constant presence in *Popular Computing Weekly*'s own top-ten best-sellers by format. (It's now become pretty sought-after, in case you've still got a copy.)

SIDE ORDER OF CHIPS

Thanks to the falling cost of RAM chips, and Sinclair's own cost-cutting production methods, you could get



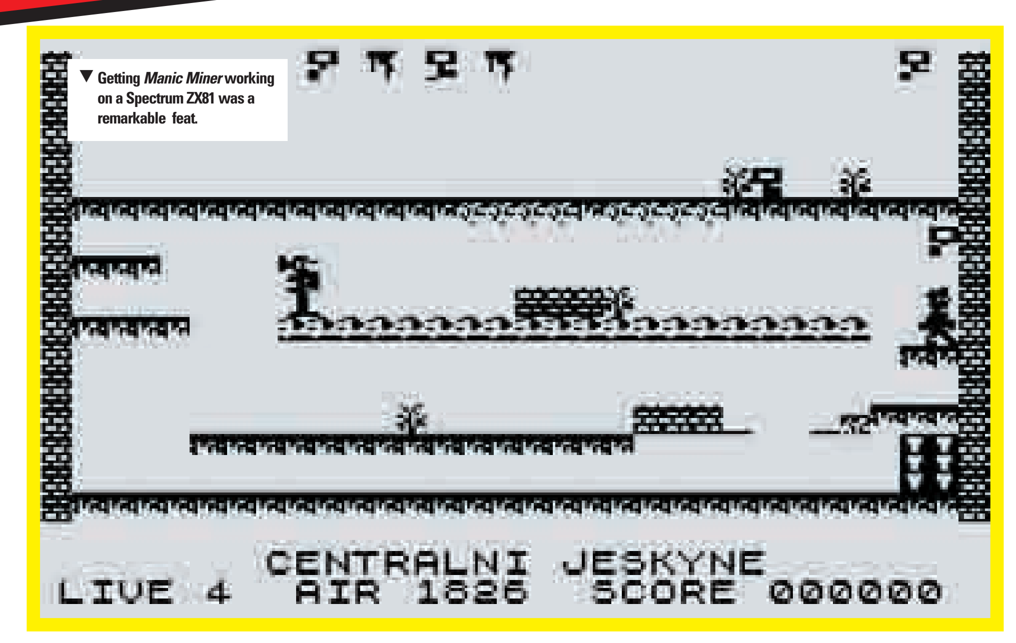
▲ Simulating high-resolution graphics was possible, as proved by Software Farm's *Rocket Man*.

I ❤ THE ZX81

There's something about this machine being so limited and frankly naff you'd have thought it would have sunk like the Titanic. But thanks to the creativity and imagination of many programmers (some of whom launched lengthy careers on the ZX81) the machine boasted some great games. Its operating system was designed to be user-friendly, and it came bundled with user manuals that even an absolute beginner could understand.

Its impact on the UK market is similar to that of the Mini – or, put another way, it's the Mini of the computing world. This small, elegant, mass-produced and affordable machine is a timeless British classic that got people computing and set the country on a path that has led the UK to become a world-leader in games design and creativity.

SHAUN BEBBINGTON



▼ Getting *Manic Miner* working on a Spectrum ZX81 was a remarkable feat.

hold of an extra 16K of RAM for a measly £49.95, meaning that buying a ZX81 kit and RAM pack would cost under £100. Thousands were quick to make their purchase, leading many third-party companies to offer solutions and upgrades to cater for the machine's shortfalls. These included tactile keyboards (which would be secured above the original membrane) to hi-res graphics modules to 64K RAM packs. It was exactly what Sinclair intended – a system that would grow with the user.

Due to the amount of software that required 16K RAM, most Sinclair owners had expansions connected to their computer, and thus came the infamous 'RAM pack wobble'. This was due to Sinclair's cost-cutting production methods as any expansion wouldn't connect securely to the machine, especially if one of the small rubber feet on the bottom of the machine was missing.

Being too heavy-handed with the machine would cause the connected pack to crash. It led to many home-made solutions to secure any expansions, including elastic bands or Velcro.

Other problems included getting the volume of the tape player absolutely right when loading games, which was complicated by the fact that different titles required different volume levels because of the varying qualities and methods of tape duplication. Even if you got it right on one side of the tape, it wouldn't always mean that the other side would load at that level. And with no other available storage medium, patience was often required – especially if the cassette player was a communal one and a sibling had altered the volume to listen to the latest Grand Master Flash And The Furious Five single. Many companies therefore sold 'datacorders' – tape players specifically designed for the home computer market. Buying such an item, however, wouldn't mean that loading games was any less painful.

Finally, the lack of a joystick port meant that most games had to be controlled by the keyboard which could be a little fiddly because of the size of each key. Joystick interfaces that were created unfortunately didn't work with Sinclair's 16K RAM packs as there was no pass-through on those or the joystick interface, so other third-party RAM packs with pass-through ports were needed. As very few games supported joystick interfaces, it made owning one rather pointless. Also, connecting more than one device to the ZX81 would definitely require some kind of civil engineering solution to hold everything in place securely – as you can imagine.

RISE AND FALL

Sinclair realised that as the computer market matured, a new machine was needed to compete against the many American imports, especially from Commodore, his closest competitor. Sinclair Research was working on the ZX82, which would feature sound and colour graphics. In order to keep costs low, much of the ZX81's architecture was used, and a year after the launch of the ZX81 came the ZX Spectrum.

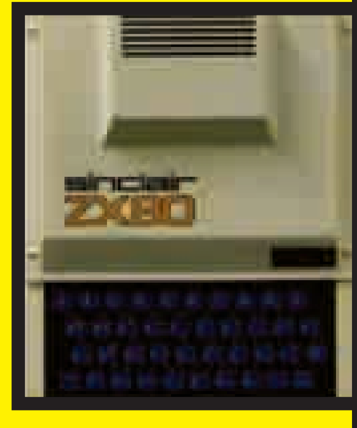
Following this new machine, Sinclair slashed the price of the ZX81 to just £49.95 for a built unit, and during the Christmas 1982 period it sold more computers than any other manufacturer, shifting nearly 200,000 units. By comparison, Commodore only managed just over 32,500 sales for the same period. In early 1983, *Home Computing Weekly* reported that around 1.1 million computers had entered the home in the UK, with Sinclair accounting for just over half the market.

The March 1983 edition of *Sinclair User* reported that Clive Sinclair's personal wealth was in excess of £120 million with Sinclair Research being valued at £136 million, and with the growing success of the company the price of the ZX81 fell yet again. For just £45 you could buy a new ZX81 with 16K RAM pack and game. A reported 900,000 machines had been sold worldwide, including the Sinclair-Timex variants in the US (see The Bluffer's Guide).

Despite its popularity, the ZX81 wasn't sophisticated enough to compete with newer generations of personal computers. Sinclair's focus on its Spectrum and new QL machines meant that the ZX81's days were numbered and, as it turned out, so was Sinclair Research's. It hit troubled times during 1985 due, in part, to slowing computer sales. By 1986, Amstrad purchased the rights to all Sinclair computer products for a mere £5 million.

It's hard to imagine the UK computer market without Clive Sinclair, who was knighted for his efforts in June 1983. With his quirky and cheap machines, he almost certainly brought about the popularisation of home computing, which led to microcomputer technology being used for the world's most popular pastime. And this wouldn't have been possible without the ZX81, a true British classic in every respect. ●

"CONNECTING MORE THAN ONE DEVICE TO THE ZX81 REQUIRED SOME SORT OF CIVIL ENGINEERING TO HOLD EVERYTHING IN PLACE"



THE BLUFFER'S GUIDE

■ As many enthusiasts explored the ZX81's hardware, they found a way to display high-resolution graphics without the need for additional expansions. This gave the machine a similar resolution to that of the ZX Spectrum. Late in the machine's commercial life, Bristol-based Software Farm capitalised on this by producing several games including the acclaimed *Rocket Man*.

■ ZX81 guru Ales Martinik managed to port *Manic Miner* back in 1984, squeezing in 11 levels from the original and even porting much of the animation to great effect. This was never officially released by Software Projects, but thanks to the internet and emulation it has found its way into the public domain for ZX81 and *Willy* fans to enjoy.

■ In order to break into the US market, Sinclair teamed up with Timex to produce a range of machines including the ZX81-based TS-1000 and TS-1500. Despite the TS-1000 having 2K of RAM and initial success, the more mature US market didn't warm to the problematic, cheap and unsophisticated hardware. The Sinclair and Timex partnership ended in late 1983 after Timex suffered huge losses following a series of costly failures.



Enter The Dragoon

Magical, mystical, beautiful and absorbing – the Panzer Dragoon series brought a bit of enchantment to Sega's troubled Saturn. John Szczepaniak looks back at a classic franchise…

Retro Feature

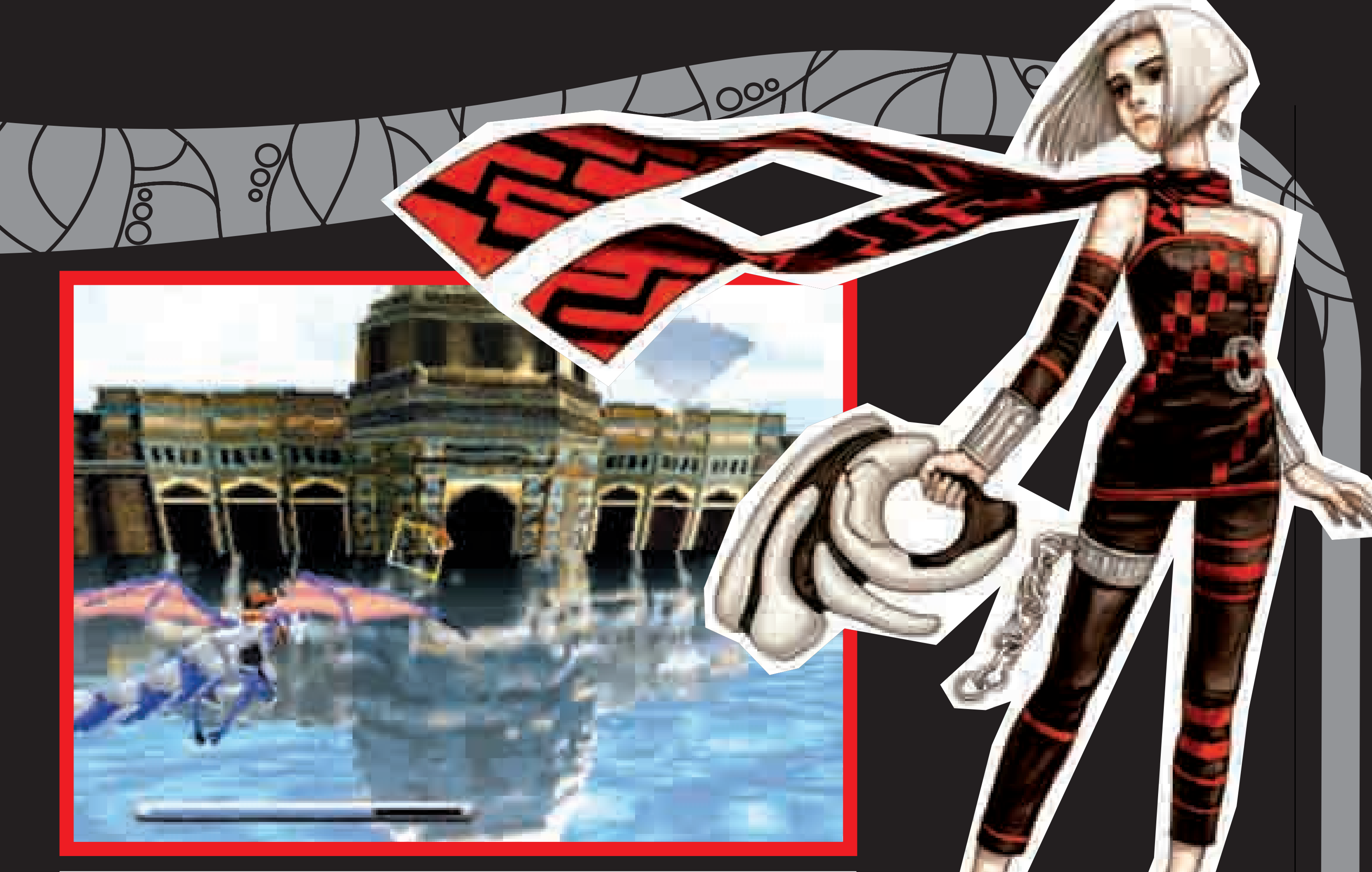


In all forms of media there are examples of exquisitely crafted worlds that provide the background to lengthy narratives. Worlds where every facet has been fully fleshed out and planned, and where entire new cultures have been formed. In books and film, from *The Lord Of The Rings* to *Dune*, there are examples of such magnificent works. In videogames it is no different: the realm of *Panzer Dragoon* is our equivalent of Middle-earth or Arrakis. Now, more than a decade after its creation, it still stands as a shining and beautiful example of what visionary designers can create.

March 2005 saw the tenth anniversary of this phenomenal franchise, and with the exception of a few die-hard fan sites, most people seem to have sadly forgotten the series and what it achieved. The legacy of these titles is inevitably intertwined with those of Sega and its Saturn, and as such needs to be remembered.

Ten years ago, *Panzer Dragoon* burst onto the Saturn as a launch title, courtesy of Sega's newly formed Team Andromeda studio. Once the 15-strong team had decided on the concept, it would take them 12 months to complete development. The game would showcase what the system was graphically capable of and induce a sense of awe in a generation of gamers. Some readers may recall magazines of the day going into shock, frantically printing scans of photos taken from Japanese publications. The excitement was certainly justified.

The game played like a natural evolution of another Sega classic, *Space Harrier*, and took the form of an intense on-rails shooter. The environments were fleshed out in full eye-popping 3D, with some scenery and enemies being formed from scaling sprites. It innovated, though, by allowing players to rotate at 90-degree angles around their dragon steed, granting a full 360 degrees of blasting potential. Players could either



▲ Breathtaking vistas like this have been drawing gamers into the world of *Panzer Dragoon* for over ten years now. Long may it continue.

lock on to targets or fire manually, and the pace was relentless with waves of enemies and some massive bosses. While visually not quite as impressive as today's games, *Panzer Dragoon* was the first taste of 'next-gen' titles after the 16-bit era. The game also earned many fans with its perfectly balanced gameplay, which resulted in a PC port.

An interesting thing about the first game that few gamers realise, and something present in later iterations, is the influence and involvement of the French artist Jean Giraud (AKA Moebius). The staff at Team Andromeda were huge fans of his work, using his art as a source of inspiration. After creating the characters, Sega sent over images and commissioned Moebius to do some illustrations. These went on to become the front and back covers for the Japanese release, which is why his name is credited. Typically, Western gamers didn't get to see these sumptuous works of art; instead, throughout the series we had appalling CG renders.

EIN UND ZWEI

For the Germanically numbered sequel – P*anzer Dragoon II: Zwei* – which is actually set prior to the events of the first game, Sega increased the development team to 20 people. It again took a full year before the game was complete, and it was released a little less than two weeks after the first anniversary of the series in 1996. The reason for setting it prior to the first game was to build on the storyline, making it a more cinematic title.

Zwei is basically *Panzer Dragoon* on steroids, with literally everything getting an upgrade. While graphically even more amazing than its predecessor, with additional shading effects and a higher frame rate, it's the game mechanics that received the greatest improvement. Unlike the first game, players began riding on the back of a flightless dragon that grew and developed between each stage. Depending on the player's performance, the dragon will evolve into a variety of different forms, the challenge, of course, being to discover them all. There is also the addition of a much-needed Berserk Attack – useful for those particularly intense sections.

If the Saturn's birth was linked with a *Panzer Dragoon* game, then in a bitter twist of irony so was its death. At least for the West, where one of the final games released in 1998 was the third *Panzer* title, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, or *Azel: Panzer Dragoon RPG* as it was known in ▷

"A DECADE ON, PANZER DRAGOON STANDS AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT VISIONARY DESIGNERS CAN CREATE"

PANZER PRODUCTS

Surprisingly, there wasn't a great deal of *Panzer Dragoon* merchandise produced until the release of *Orta*. After that there was everything from mugs, badges, posters and even a special-edition white Xbox. The biggest non-game product has to be the 30-minute anime video, which is available dubbed. Unfortunately, most fans think it's dreadful, with its crude CGI for the backgrounds and a nearly non-existent storyline. It's a pity, since the games contain an incredibly rich and deep narrative that easily rivals those of other mediums.

Despite rumours, there's no evidence of any official *Panzer Dragoon* manga, though there are countless strategy guides. Even more interesting is the existence of fiction novels based on the *Panzer Dragoon* universe, though these are only available in Japan. For something more off the beaten track there's the *Arzach* graphic novel by Moebius, which greatly inspired aspects of *Panzer Dragoon*, and the two share many similarities. Although French in origin, there's no text so there's no language barrier to worry about.

Enter The Dragoon

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

The *Panzer Dragoon* history prior to its release is filled with rumours, speculation and several interesting screenshots, and none are more thought-provoking than those that emerged after the 1994 Consumer Electronic Show. In preparation for the eventual launch of its Saturn hardware, Sega was showcasing several prototype demos, one of which was titled '3D Shooting Game'. The subsequent magazine coverage and photos of the footage not only reveal a game that shares many similarities with *Panzer Dragoon*, but one full of clichéd ideas that would have proved quite dull if left unaltered.

Is it possible that the series we all love nearly ended up devoid of the style that defines it? The debate regarding this pre-alpha game even sparked an excellent, lengthy essay on www.panzerdragoon.net. We're unlikely to ever be certain, but can at least rest easy knowing that Team Andromeda ultimately stuck to its vision.

Japan. If the Saturn went out in a blaze of glory, then *Saga* was one of its battle cries. With only 5,000 or so English-language copies sent to each Western territory, due to the Saturn being on its last legs, the game now fetches over £100. Even the first disc of this epic four-CD game, which was given away as a demo with May 1998's *Sega Saturn Magazine* in the UK, often reaches double figures under the hammer. Such steep prices are not unwarranted, though.

Sega's account of the game's history reveals some interesting facts. Development of *Saga* actually started alongside *Zwei*, even though the game was released two years later. (This would explain why *Zwei* can recognise save data from a game released much later.) Sega also had to double the size of the team working on it, bolstering it to 40.

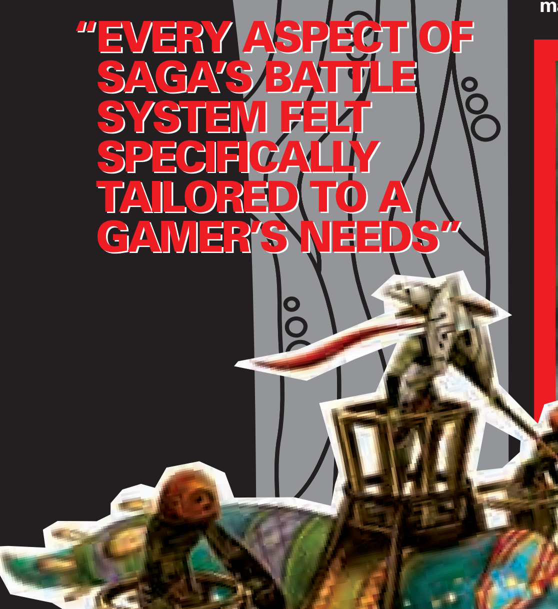
But like so many great works of art, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was plagued by problems that threatened to derail the project, including the death of a team member. Things were so problematic that the entire development team went to a Japanese shrine for 'purification' in order to stave off their bad luck. Fate must have smiled on them, because they would go on to create one of the greatest games the world has known.

Saga eschewed the all-out blasting of previous games, shrewdly taking an RPG approach in order to better facilitate the amazing narrative that had been created. It was and still is like no other RPG that exists, helping to make it even more desirable today. From the outset the player was granted the massive freedom to fly where they pleased within the great Panzerian world. Within no time players were gliding across the great desert ruins watching as Sand Worms arched across the delicate skyline, feeling surreally reminiscent of the James Herbert/David Lynch classic, *Dune*. The battle system was also unlike that of other RPGs; every aspect of it felt fresh and new, and specifically tailored to a gamer's needs. Today it stands as a title that everyone should enjoy at least once, for the overall experience and also for the dramatic change in pace and RPG mechanics.

Trying to describe the epic proportions of this extraordinary classic within the confines of this feature would be a severe injustice, which is why the pinnacle of this series is further examined in the Greatest Retro Game Ever feature on page 146.



"EVERY ASPECT OF SAGA'S BATTLE SYSTEM FELT SPECIFICALLY TAILORED TO A GAMER'S NEEDS"



▲ Aerial acrobatics, giant enemies, lush environments – the *Panzer Dragoon* games have got them all.





▲ This is the ultra-rare, nigh-on legendary Pocket Arcade *Panzer*. Come on, you know you want it…

A DELICATE BALANCE

Some games are often accused of trying to be too cinematic and are said to be lacking solid gameplay. The *Panzer Dragoon* titles are some of the few that manage to maintain a perfect balance between narrative atmosphere and actual gameplay design. For the countless pages that could be written on their art styles, perfect worlds and the experience they give, at the end of the day the games within can stand on their own merits. In a modern climate seemingly averse to shoot-'em-ups there is tremendous fun to be had playing the originals. Likewise, these weren't simple, hollow games created as a vehicle for the technology. Genuine care was taken to give them some of the most striking and unique stories and styles in gaming history.

The imagery was originally envisioned by Manabu Kusunoki, who made it his goal to create something that had never been seen or experienced before. While other games followed a more generic sci-fi or medieval route, *Panzer Dragoon* had a unique fantasy setting that was awe-inspiring, although it did take some inspiration from classic animations such as *Nausicaa* and *Les Mondes Engloutis*.

There is no better proof of the attention to detail lavished on its creation than the invented language spoken throughout, affectionately nicknamed Panzerese. Team Andromeda went to tremendous lengths to synthesise this new dialect (much like Tolkien did with Middle-earth languages) with its origins in ancient Greek, Latin and German. They also went on to voice all of the dialogue themselves; acting was the hobby of one of the games' designers. There's even a fan-made dictionary online: www.realitygauge.com/panzereng3.htm

POCKET PANZER

Along with three iterations on Sega's own console, *Panzer Dragoon* received three portable instalments. The first was for Tiger's ill-fated R-Zone LCD system that used interchangeable cartridges. Quite rare, sources say it was presumably released soon after the original game in order to cash in on its popularity. From here things grow complicated, since there is much debate regarding a second even rarer LCD handheld with a flip-top lid, released sometime later as part of Sega's Pocket Arcade range.

It featured a coloured background based on the early Uru stages, and gameplay consisted of manoeuvring a cursor over a 3x3 grid while shooting enemies. Some believe this to be a standalone remake of the R-Zone title, while others argue there was another handheld with special casing designs and the moniker 'Imperial Challenge'. However, little else is known about this version, so it may be consigned to the 'legend' bin of history.

There was also a Japanese Game Gear game, released in November 1996, called *Panzer Dragoon Mini*. It was wholly without narrative while the gameplay, which only involves moving a cursor and shooting, was hampered severely by the technology – there's little reason to recommend it to anyone other than collectors. Don't expect to find any of these easily, since all of them, especially the LCD games, are ridiculously rare.

NEXT-GEN DRAGOONS

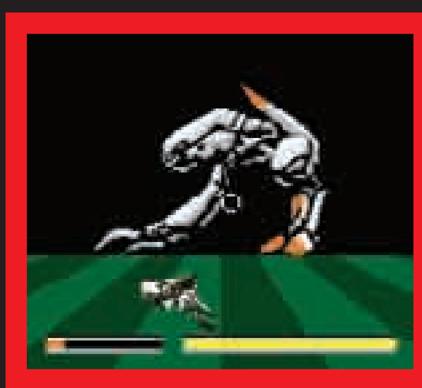
Beyond Sega's own hardware, *Panzer Dragoon* took an unusual turn. Sega's previous development teams became individual companies, such as Smilebit, which were formed by previous Team Andromeda members. It was Smilebit who went on to update the series for the next generation with the release of *Panzer Dragoon Orta* on the Xbox in 2002.

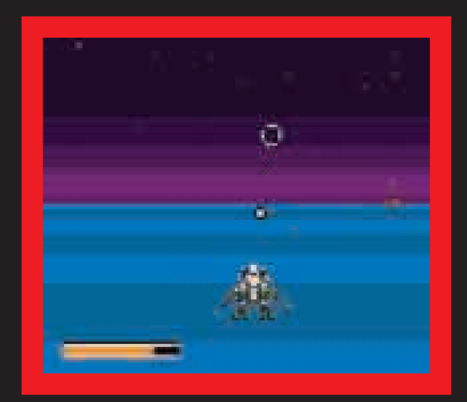
Visually it's one of the most impressive titles on the system, with souped-up gameplay to match. There was real-time dragon morphing and growth, bonus side-quests, galleries and a fully comprehensive encyclopaedia on the world, while as a special bonus you could unlock the first game that had been ported over from PC. These extra features made it perfect for fans desperate to know more precise details regarding the plot.

Today many gamers lament *Orta*'s poor sales. Its underperformance is a shame, since it's arguably one of the highlights of the current generation. As well as the improved gameplay and astounding aesthetics, there was another thing of note: included on all Japanese copies is a hidden English-language option that's selected automatically when played on a Western Xbox with a mod chip. Clearly, someone at Sega cares about the gamers.

Beyond *Orta* there's only speculation regarding the future of *Panzer Dragoon*. While the possibility of a follow-up RPG is incredibly exciting, we can't help but feel some trepidation. Sega has been mutating many of its best-loved franchises in an attempt to appeal to a more casual market, which would spell instant disaster for this series. However, so long as any sequel sticks to *Panzer Dragoon*'s roots, there may still be hope for the future of one of gaming's greatest franchises.

▼ *Panzer Dragoon Mini* on the Game Gear was, um, rudimentary…







▲ Xbox's *Orta* was terrific but didn't reach a wide audience.



Greatest RETRO Game Ever

Panzer Dragoon Saga

ON A WING AND A PRAYER

Release: 1998
Format: Saturn
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Team Andromeda

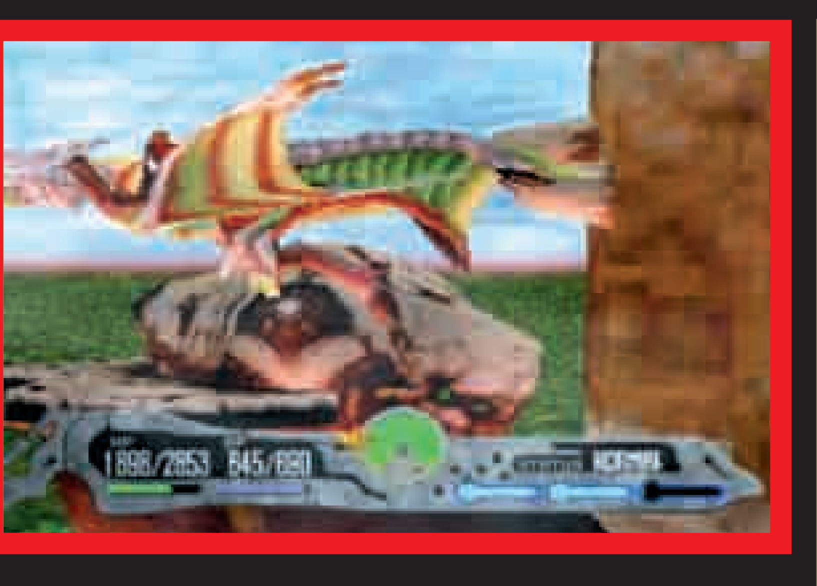
Completing *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for the first time is a bittersweet experience that only the greatest games can create. After losing yourself for 20-odd hours in Team Andromeda's gorgeously constructed world, returning to reality is harsh; you're immediately struck by pangs of regret that you couldn't stay just that little bit longer.

But it's not until you finally complete the third game in the *Panzer Dragoon* series and witness its wonderfully oblique ending that you suddenly realise just how much of this amazing game you've yet to uncover. Like the very best examples of the genre – *Final Fantasy VII, Ocarina Of Time* – *Saga* has so many subtle secrets hidden within its wonderfully detailed environments that you can't help but return in order to retrieve every last treasure.

Sadly, few people ever got to sample Team Andromeda's masterpiece. Released in the UK just as the Saturn was going through its death throes, *Saga* just didn't reach a large enough audience (bizarre really, considering over 30,000 *Sega Saturn Magazine* readers received a free copy of disc one). Of course, it's quite possible that *Saga*'s somewhat linear beginning put many gamers off, as it initially appears to be no different from any other RPG of the time.

Hero Edge is part of a group guarding a construction site for the Empire when they uncover a strange girl (later revealed to be a Drone named Azel, *Saga*'s name in the East). Within moments of the discovery, Craymen, the Emperor's right-hand man, attacks the group and steals Azel, leaving Edge and his companions to die. Upon awaking, Edge teams up with a rare dragon and sets off in hot pursuit of Craymen, his blood boiling with revenge for his murdered workmates.

While *Saga*'s main plot was rather generic, it was driven by a selection of superb characterisations that put many similar games to shame. As the story progressed you developed a bond with these individuals that was easily as strong as the one Edge forms with his dragon, and the trials and tribulations each character faced were just as heart-rending as those of any art-house film. Indeed, Edge's realisation when he discovers the true identity of the 'divine visitor' that *Saga* constantly hints at is one of gaming's defining moments and delivers a sucker punch that Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid 2* tried to muster but couldn't.





Keen to extend *Saga*'s (admittedly short) game time Team Andromeda included plenty of extras for the avid player to uncover. As well as unlocking three enjoyable mini-games – Fleet On The Lake, Dermot's Ranch and Ancient Valley – you also got the chance to return to the field map and uncover more items. Chief among these were the hidden D-Units in order to upgrade your dragon to Light Wing status, and later a powerful Solo Wing form. There was also a baby dragon to find – this was integral to achieving Solo Wing status so you had to make sure you discovered every last section of each map.

BOX OF DELIGHTS

Players starting *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for the first time received a handy money boost if they had a *Panzer Dragoon II: Zwei* save. Upon starting the game, *Saga* immediately took into consideration how many hours you had spent playing *Zwei* and gave you a healthy cash bonus; for every hour you had amassed in *Zwei* you received 100 Dyne (*Saga*'s currency). Furthermore, a young girl in the holy district of Zoah gave you a music box that plays the *Zwei* theme tune whenever you made camp. Similarly, by completing *Saga* you got to unlock Pandora's Box in *Zwei* (to save you playing the game for 30 hours). Once the box was unlocked you were able to alter virtually every aspect of the game. It was a great touch and gave you more incentive to complete each game – as if any was needed…





▲ *Panzer Dragoon Saga* had all the characteristic style and magic of the *Panzer Dragoon* series, but mixed it with a fascinating story with a killer twist.

The believable characters that Team Andromeda created were further fleshed out by the beautifully constructed world they inhabited, and like the character development, the aesthetics grew richer the further you progressed.

After leaving the sparse (and stiflingly linear) valley that surrounded the excavation site, *Saga* gloriously unfolded as Edge reached the Garil Desert. Watching huge sand worms majestically weaving through a hostile desert instantly created an alien yet believable world, and as the four-disc epic continued the journey just got better and better.

Saga's starting to show its age now – especially whenever Edge visits a village – but the game was a revelation in 1998 and pushed the Saturn like no other title before it. Huge environments, beautifully crafted enemies, and awe-inspiring bosses were all painstakingly weaved together, with the end result being a glorious tapestry of artistic invention.

The game's blend of organic and futuristic visuals, along with its free-roaming locales that pulsed with life, provided the dedicated gamer with plenty of vivid images that became indelibly seared upon the brain. Witnessing the maelstrom of Georgius, exploring the cold underground ruins of Uru and flying beneath the never-ending form of the huge battleship Mal Kava were just a few of *Saga*'s highlights.

If the visuals had been taken to previously unseen heights, *Saga*'s superb score easily matched them. Despite its eclectic range – Team Andromeda used anything from orchestral strings to tribal drumbeats – the soundtrack never felt out of place and perfectly complemented Edge's on-screen exploits. From the tranquil tune that played whenever you made camp to the many rousing battle themes, *Saga* was filled with an undulating, consistently changing soundtrack that flawlessly matched the game's tempo. Underlining the superb score was a rich narrative that was delivered by some impressive voice acting that even today puts many other games to shame.

For all its beautiful aesthetics and carefully unravelling storyline it's the wonderfully constructed, real-time combat system that made *Saga* such a unique experience. The menu-driven system was a natural evolution of the original game's play mechanics and while it looked confusing it proved extremely intuitive. Three continually charging bars governed your available choices each turn and once a bar was filled you could effectively freeze the game while you considered your next move. Performing a simple action like firing Edge's gun, unleashing a barrage of lasers from your Dragon or selecting an item would cost one bar, while accessing your dragon's Berserk meter would be more.

The actual Berserk modes came in a vast array of varieties and ranged from the ability to fully heal your Dragon to devastating your opponents with massive scythes of pure energy. It was also possible to continually move around your opponents (again, a throwback to the previous games), which added another, deeper, level of strategy.

As the game progressed it become possible to morph your dragon into four new forms – Attack, Defence, Spiritual and Agility – which gradually improved the more you used them. This in turn would greatly affect the final form of your dragon, so care was needed to ensure it stayed as balanced as possible (a constantly upgraded attack dragon, for example, would end up sporting a relatively poor defence). By continually changing between abilities you unlocked unique Berserker skills, so no two games were ever the same.

Saga may be just a videogame, but it's filled with stand-out moments that transcend the disc-based medium. The jubilation felt when you successfully managed to stop the Deathmaker (a huge ground-to-air missile) from wiping out the peaceful village of Zoah is cruelly juxtaposed by the village's ruthless obliteration later in the game.

Saga delivered these dizzying highs and devastating lows with satisfying frequency and to this day remains a defining achievement for RPGs and Sega alike.



Why Don't They Remake...

SHADOW OF THE BEAST

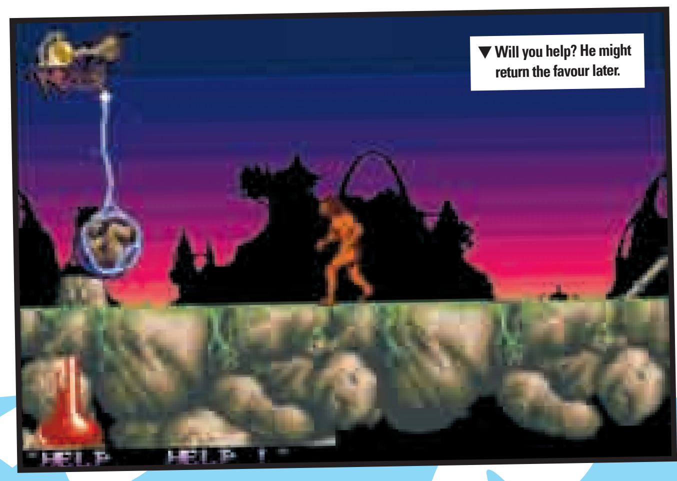
TIME FOR THIS ATMOSPHERIC CLASSIC TO STEP OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Release: **1989-1992**
Format: **Various Home Systems**
Publisher: **Psygnosis**
Developer: **Reflections**

The *Shadow Of The Beast* series is best remembered for one thing – atmosphere. From the haunting disquiet of the synth-organ music to the ground-breaking parallax scrolling environments, Psygnosis' trilogy was carved into the retro landscape with the elegance of Rodin. It boasted what many games still aspire to: a game world that transports the player to another world, one of melancholy and impending terror.

However, despite its allure, the series was let down by one crucial element: gameplay. Even ignoring the unintentionally comic monsters in the first instalment, *SOTB*'s core gameplay mechanic consisted of little more than marching across the screen, quickly being overwhelmed by hordes of enemies, striking them with a large ball on a chain, missing, crumbling into a pile of bones, crying, watching the brilliant game-over screen, then starting again. From the beginning.

But how should this beast be altered 15 years on? The core of the trilogy's success was always its aesthetic appeal, so with the audio-visual oomph that the next generation will provide, a re-imagining of Reflections' story could prove very successful. The question is – 2D or 3D? Considering *SOTB*'s strengths lie outside its gameplay, recreating the subtle hues of the series' menacing world in the third dimension could add character and ambience to an already striking environment. Imagine dynamic lighting on those moonlit hills, or wading through that swirling river – only now it's a raging mass of water as dangerous as any enemy.

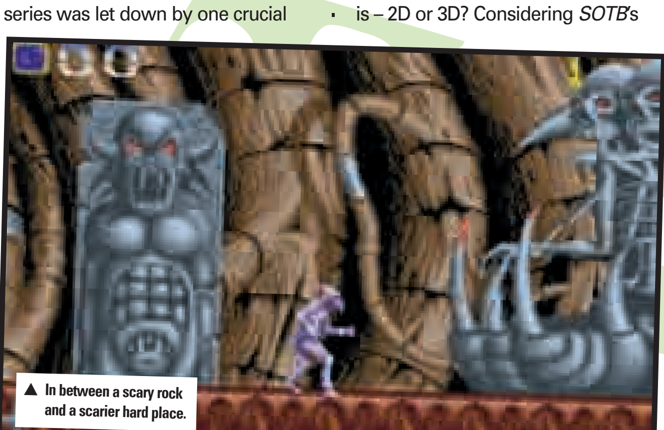


▼ Will you help? He might return the favour later.

By downplaying the originals' reliance on frantic and unsatisfying combat, and focusing on themes of adventure, atmosphere and emotive reaction, 'Shadow Of The Beast '05' could prove extremely successful. Couple this with surround sound (with remixed versions of the original tunes, naturally) and fans of the series would be in for a treat.

Doubtless there would be those in uproar about another classic series being 'destroyed' by the extra dimension. In this case, however, mimicking the originals' gameplay and placing it in a 3D environment would put the franchise in direct competition with the likes of *Devil May Cry* and *God Of War*. We'd like to see a slight change of direction, a slower pace, a deeper combat engine, and atmosphere as affecting as *Doom 3*'s, but with the ethereal ideology of *Ico*.

Shadow Of The Beast, as a series, is ripe for a reworking. Games so drenched in atmosphere already have a jump start on most of today's derivative nonsense. If a savvy developer could marry an enjoyable game engine to the visuals that the series demands, then the beast would be ready to step back into the light.


▲ In between a scary rock and a scarier hard place.

TIME TO REFLECT

The *Shadow Of The Beast* series was co-created by Paul Howarth and Martin Edmonson under the name Reflections, and the insane difficulty synonymous with the franchise has reared its ugly head in much of the company's work since. *Stuntman* and the punishing *Driver* games (well, the early *Driver* games) are infamous for causing hysterical bouts of repeated joypad hurling. Those tempted to return to Karamoon to revisit the beast should beware – the brutality of having to start the whole game again after hours of progress is a far harsher punishment in the current-day world of the quick save.





REVOLUTION X (Arcade) Midway, 1994 – Original arcade flyer



THE BASTARD SON OF...

SHINOBI X

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU BOUGHT THE SEQUEL TO A GREAT GAME ONLY TO FIND THAT IT'S RUBBISH? ALTHOUGH MANY FRANCHISES BECAME STALE WITH AGE, EVERY NOW AND THEN A SEQUEL GOT RELEASED THAT TRULY SHOCKED US WITH ITS MEDIOCRITY. THIS MONTH'S ENTRY IN THE SEQUEL HALL OF SHAME IS THE WOEFUL SHINOBI X…

Format: Saturn
Release: 1995 (US)
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

Considering the original *Shinobi* has aged so well it's surprising to see how many duff sequels Sega has produced over the past 18 years. We've already covered the dire arcade sequel *Shadow Dancer* (bizarrely eclipsed by a superior Mega Drive remake) but the laughable *Shinobi X* is also worthy of a mention. Like so many 'so bad it's good' games *Shinobi X* compels you to battle on through, even when you know you could be doing more important things with your time – like plucking hairs from your lower back…

The Revenge Of Shinobi, *Shadow Dancer* and *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master* all proved to be enjoyable experiences on the Mega Drive, and with the arrival of the Saturn fans eagerly looked forward to a *Shinobi* game that would showcase the machine's capabilities (especially as no *Shinobi* title appeared on the Mega CD). Sadly, it wasn't to be, and while *Shinobi X* certainly isn't the worst Saturn game ever made, it falls seriously short of the high standards that so many previous *Shinobi* titles had set.

Unlike earlier *Shinobi* instalments *Shinobi X* was quite plot heavy and told the tale of two warring brothers.



▲ *Shinobi X*'s levels range from the humdrum to the excellent. This one, alas, is not excellent…



▲ This freaky mask guy may be the first boss but he'll still have you gnashing your teeth in frustration.

Initially trained under the same master, the older boy, Kazuma, craved power and left when his mentor refused to teach him his most devastating techniques. The story starts when younger brother Sho returns home and discovers that a vengeful Kazuma has kidnapped their mentor's daughter and is now holding her hostage in his fortress (you couldn't make it up…).

This flimsy set-up is an excuse for Sega to unleash some of the most horrendous FMV sequences we've ever seen. It's not the dated footage that's the problem, just the atrociously bad acting. It's so painful it's funny and provides masses of entertainment (although not in the way Sega was intending).

Hilarious FMV sequences weren't the only problems to hamstring *Shinobi X*, as its digital graphics also proved exceptionally poor. While Sho himself was reasonably well animated – apart from his hilarious running – his opponents didn't receive the same lavish attention and wouldn't have looked out of place in Atari's appalling *Pit Fighter*. What infuriated most about *Shinobi X*'s visuals though was that everything was so unbalanced. Some stages looked beautiful and fully captured the mystique of earlier titles (especially *The Revenge Of Shinobi*) while other levels appeared to have been cobbled together from God knows what other failed projects.

The same could be said for many of the enemies; several bosses still hold up under scrutiny today, but creatures like Level 3's dinosaurs (which looked like gangrene-covered phalluses) left a lot to be desired. It's a good job that at least the music was of a high quality, although with Richard Jacques at the helm it was only to be expected.

Of course, *Shinobi X*'s inconsistent visuals wouldn't matter if the gameplay was up to scratch, but Sega managed to drop the ball again by delivering a stilted play experience that lacked



▲ "I think you should strangle it quickly before it tries to make friends with us." Well, go on then.

the subtleties of other games in the series. Double jumps were fiendishly difficult to pull off, the controls had none of the tightness of previous games, and Sho had an annoying tendency to leap around like a drug-fuelled Zebedee.

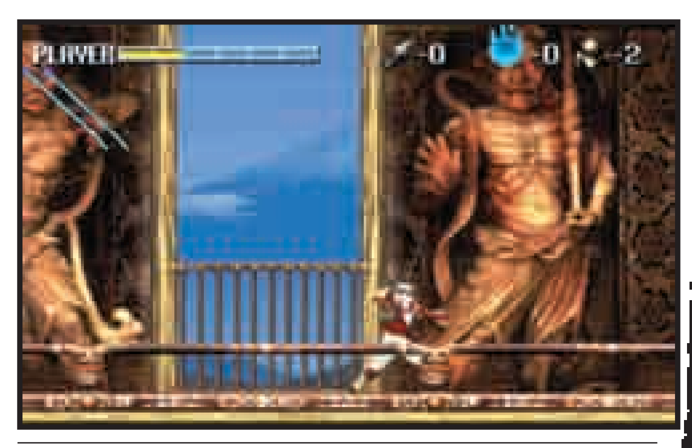
Another bugbear was *Shinobi X*'s level design; it was uninspired and lacked the creative flair that had been seen in *Shinobi III*, or even the original arcade game for that matter.

One other notable difference is that *Shinobi X* is much more sword-based than previous games and while it worked to a point it just didn't feel right – and that's *Shinobi X*'s biggest problem: while it's by no means the worst game we've ever played it's certainly not deserving of its rich heritage. While there are many gamers who rate *Shinobi X* pretty highly, as a continuation of the classic *Shinobi* series it remains a very poor effort.

HANDHELD HORROR

While the PlayStation2 has hosted two fairly decent *Shinobi* titles, Game Boy Advance owners haven't been quite so lucky. When Sega first announced that *The Revenge Of Shinobi* would be appearing on Nintendo's handheld, many gamers expected an enhanced update of the Mega Drive hit.

Sadly, we were instead treated to a shambling mess that gave a bad name to both the *Shinobi* franchise and Game Boy Advance titles in general. Poor graphics and lacklustre gameplay turned what could have been an okay conversion into the portable equivalent of *Shinobi X*. Let's hope Sega doesn't make the same mistake in the future.



▲ Are those statues a deliberate homage to the original game or just for decoration? Who knows…

RESIDENT EVIL

IT CAN'T GET ANY WORSE THAN THE LIVING DEAD, RIGHT?

Great Retro Gaming Moments

Release: 1996
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House

***Resident Evil* has so many highlights that it's tricky to pick just one. But we've managed to pull out the moment when Capcom decided to make staying alive in Raccoon City a full-time job.**

On your return from the Guardhouse after a spot of weed eradication, all seems eerily quiet. There's not an animated corpse in sight as you go back to the mansion with your new-found Helmet Key, but as you approach the door something strange happens…

The view cuts to where you were a few moments ago, and with an eerie fish-eyed, first-person viewpoint the camera bounds across the courtyard towards you. But whose eyes are you seeing through? It's too quick to be a zombie and too agile for a Cerberus. You start to panic – what is this thing?

Capcom doesn't beat about the bush in answering your question. As the cut-scene ends the game cuts back to your current position and you're confronted with a hulking green lizard-like creature – the Hunter. It leaps towards you and panic goes critical. You start flinging buckshot around like there's no tomorrow to keep this… thing at bay and eventually it drops with a piercing screech. Relieved, exhausted and fairly proud of yourself, you enter the mansion to continue your exploration without even pausing to rest.

Click. Click. Click. What's that noise? As you cautiously turn the corner another Hunter leaps down the corridor at you from off screen and sticks its massive claws through your pretty little face. Oh. Yeah, someone forgot to mention – those things are everywhere now. You'll never hear that clicking noise without shuddering again…



▼ Ha! Got that one. Though not before several of them have demolished your face…



Rising Sun Retro

Release: 1993
Format: PC Engine Super CD ROM2
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House

D•R•A•C•U•L•A X: R•O•N•D•O O•F B•L•O•O•D

For many, the advent of 16-bit consoles opened up a world of import gaming. One incentive was the ability to get hold of games that would never appear outside Japan. With this in mind, we'll be taking a look at some of the import classics that never got released in the UK, and this month it's Dracula X, perhaps the greatest Castlevania game you've never played...

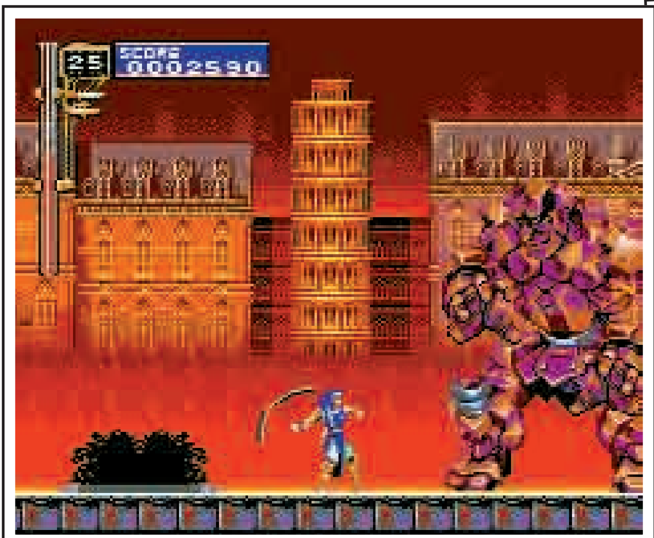
Throughout its distinguished history Konami's *Castlevania* franchise has walked two distinct paths. While several titles were content to follow the straightforward platforming route – albeit with gothic backgrounds, haunting music and fiendishly tough gameplay – later games began to add RPG elements that gave the avid fan plenty to sink their teeth into.

While *Symphony Of The Night* remains arguably the greatest example of the latter genre, it's always been the SNES's *Super Castlevania IV* that's heralded as the greatest example of the platforming category – a decision with which we'd wholeheartedly agree if it wasn't for the small matter of the PC Engine's utterly superb *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood*... which was only released in Japan.

There's no denying that the Super Nintendo's first *Castlevania* title was a quintessential example of the franchise. You only had to listen to the thunderous orchestral score as Simon Belmont precariously jumped across Mode 7-enhanced chandeliers to realise that the series had reached a (for the time) high point that previous *Castlevania*s had only hinted at. But for all its Mode 7 trickery and atmospheric score it still comes a poor second to the majesty that is *Dracula X*.

Released two years after *Super Castlevania IV*, *Dracula X* used the extra storage space that CD-ROM afforded to present a memorable experience that no other *Castlevania* platformer has bettered. Massive, wonderfully animated sprites; impressive anime-styled cut-scenes; an utterly superb musical score... they all combined to create one of the most compelling platformers we've ever played. If you think those are superfluous superlatives just play the game and you'll soon find yourself adding plenty of your own to the list.

As with the second Game Boy title, *Castlevania Adventure II:*





▲ See? Classic platforming – every decent game's got a clock tower level. Hasn't it? Well, this one has.





Belmont's Revenge, *Dracula X* was a tale of retribution, except this time it was told with impressive cut-scenes and a sumptuous score that simply dripped with atmosphere. After getting resurrected by insane cultists, Dracula kidnaps Maria Renard, the girlfriend of Richter Belmont, thus forcing the whip-toting hero to follow his destiny and put a stop to the king of darkness like every other Belmont before him. And, as in previous *Castlevania* games, *Dracula X* was no walk in the park (and even if it was, the park would have been infested with all manner of ghouls and zombies).

Part of *Dracula X*'s difficulty stemmed from the fact that Richter didn't have the same whip skills that Simon showed off so well in his first SNES outing. He was unable to whip above or diagonally and also lacked the ability to twirl his whip around himself. Still, he wasn't entirely defenceless, and while Richter lacked the agility of later heroes such as Alucard and Soma he was no slouch in the undead-killing department. The vampire slayer could employ a handy backflip to escape enemies and projectiles and also had access to the all-new Item Crush ability that caused massive amounts of damage (sadly, at the expense of losing many hearts).

There's no denying that *Dracula X* was a tough game – although it's certainly a lot more balanced than earlier titles in the series – but everything certainly got a lot easier (perhaps a little too easy) upon rescuing Maria Renard, whom you could control. With a handy double-jump and nifty slide Maria felt like a steroid-fuelled athlete against the more staid Richter and gave the normally sombre series an interesting injection of cuteness that, surprisingly, worked very well. However, the addition of Maria wasn't the only treat *Dracula X* had in store for fans…

While *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* was the first game in the franchise to explore alternative routes, Konami exploited them fully in *Dracula X* and created a title of surprising depth and complexity. After finding the odd throwaway secret room in *Super Castlevania IV* it was gratifying to uncover and explore the secrets of *Dracula X*.

While you only needed to work through seven levels in order to complete the game, a further five stages were hidden and many levels had alternative routes to discover. Some were fiendishly hidden, so even the most competent of fans were unlikely to find all the secrets that *Rondo Of Blood* had to offer in one sitting.

For all its alternative routes and secrets, it was the superb level design that really propels *Dracula X* into the stratosphere, particularly when you see the atrocious remix that appeared two years later on the SNES.

Of course, what many remember about *Rondo Of Blood* is just how damn gorgeous everything was. From the opening stage that saw Richter racing towards Dracula's castle on the back of a horse-drawn coach, to the eventual stand-off with the count himself, *Dracula X* was simply a joy to behold. Every location, whether it was the burning town of Aljiba or level five's eerie ghost ship, was created with meticulous attention to detail and oozed a macabre grimness that was later used so well in the PlayStation and Saturn versions of *Symphony Of The Night*.

Sound was also masterfully used, and while there were plenty of familiar tunes – that now sounded better than ever – Konami had also included plenty of new compositions, many of which have only been bettered by *Symphony Of The Night*.

Don't be put off by its increasingly high price tag – 12 years after its release *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* remains a true Konami classic and is yet another superb title that poor PAL gamers never got to play.

KISS OF DEATH

There is another…

When *Castlevania: Dracula X* (known as *Vampire's Kiss* in the UK) was announced for the SNES, owners of Nintendo's 16-bit console were ecstatic about receiving a sequel to the PC Engine-only *Rondo Of Blood*. Sadly, the joy was short lived, as Konami's remix (it certainly didn't feel like a true sequel) pushed all the wrong buttons. Level design was horrendous with many enemies placed in poorly thought-out locations which made avoiding them practically impossible. The visuals and sound also suffered and lacked the impact of *Dracula X*. Perhaps the most annoying fault, though, was that little Maria was no longer a playable character. While not as bad as many *Castlevania* fans suggest, *Vampire's Kiss* is certainly a disappointment when compared to its excellent forerunner.

THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

Girl power of the highest order

While four girls have been kidnapped in *Dracula X* it's only Maria Renard who can be used as a playable character, and while she's barely a child, she certainly knows how to pack a punch. Unlike the whip-wielding Richter, Maria relies on the power of her animal friends to guide her through Dracula's beautifully gothic abode.

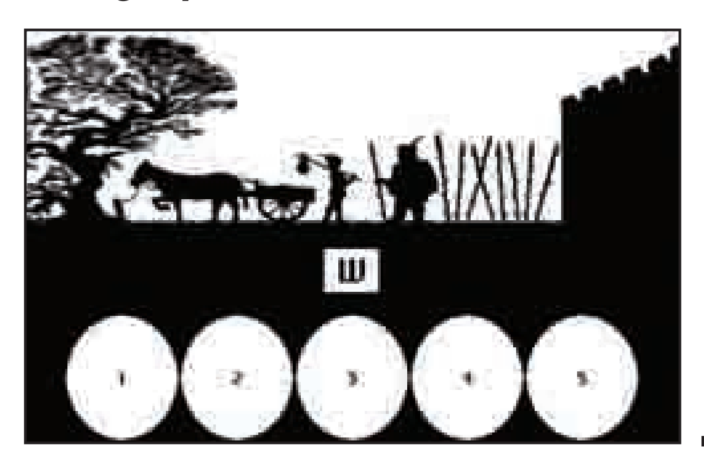
Two small doves that unerringly lock on to opponents are Maria's weapon of choice, but she also has access to four other creatures – said to be based on gods from Chinese mythology – that replace the daggers, clocks and axes that Richter can use. While she's certainly a lot more agile than Richter, she's nowhere near as hardy, so be careful when facing off against *Dracula X*'s more fearsome bosses.

CLIFF JOHNSON



interviewed by MARTIN MATHERS

He's made films, built monsters and even created a book with David Blaine, but ultimately all Cliff Johnson wants to do is satisfy his true believers. Thinking hats on, we locked brains with one of gaming's most devious minds and came off slightly the worse for wear...



For a man whose passion is the creation of cryptic puzzles, Cliff Johnson's own logic seems somewhat skewed. Speak to any game designer and you'll no doubt discover that a bit of praise from those who play their games is all the thanks they need. A pat on the back, a smile and a compliment – it's not much, but it helps. In Johnson's case though, he only asks for three simple words; words that convey every emotion felt by his followers, which let him know exactly how they feel about him and his creations. Those words? I. Hate. You.

"What better compliment could I ask for?" says Johnson, grinning. "When people gleefully declare that they hate me, that also means they've solved each and every puzzle in the game, that they've seen through all my little tricks and misdirections, no matter how long it took, and they beat me. I find no joy in frustrating people. I want people to solve my games. I want people to have a good time."

Johnson's attempts to ensure that people 'enjoy themselves' span nearly two decades and in that time he's garnered a reputation as a wrecker of lives, homes and brains. To think him a wicked man because of this, however, would be incredibly unfair as, after all, it's all done in the name of fun. His games might create the impression of an evil genius toying with our minds but in truth he's a puzzlesmith, a cerebral tormentor and a storyteller all rolled into one; the kind of person, in fact, for whom the task of creating videogames was invented.

Interestingly, Johnson's early ambitions lay not in videogames but in cinema. After his teenage years working with Super 8 he spent three years at the University of Southern California's School of Cinema and Television as a teaching assistant in film animation. He followed this by directing and producing corporate educational films – not as interesting as it sounds, by his own admission – and it wasn't until he was 32 that Johnson decided to turn to videogames rather than film to express his visions.

"I was one of 'the rest of us' who needed a user-friendly interface to coax me, kicking and screaming, into the computer age," he admits. The result, which came about two years and several credit card 'business loans' later, was *The Fool's Errand* – a game that, despite being unlike anything seen before, was a reworking of a project Johnson had started four years earlier.

"I originally created *The Fool's Errand* as a homemade puzzle book to be solved in a few sittings," he recalls. "My effort was a direct counterpoint to the treasure book *Masquerade* by Kit Williams, which both fascinated and frustrated me; I liked the idea of combining fantasy, story, art and puzzles, but I disliked the idea that, due to the valuable prize on offer, the puzzle was nigh impossible to solve."

Of course, despite Johnson's determination to create something simpler, there was nothing straightforward about *The Fool's Errand* simply because of its uniqueness in the world of videogames. Inspired by the 1973 whodunit *The Last Of Sheila* (in which invited guests played games every night in order to uncover clues to a great puzzle… at least until their host is murdered), Johnson's game was the first videogame example of a metapuzzle – one gigantic puzzle made up of many smaller ones.

Not surprisingly, the development was arduous, with Johnson comparing it to being "like Sisyphus forever rolling the boulder up a hill in Hades" but its unique gameplay and visual style, consisting of silhouette illustrations inspired by the 1926 movie *The Adventures Of Prince Achmed*, ensured its publication, if not its success until several years later.

One mountain overcome, the floodgates opened; as *The Fool's*



▲ There's enough puzzling here to make you pull out your hair and then destroy the replacement toupee.

Errand gained popularity, other puzzle titles such as *At The Carnival* (a reminiscence of Johnson's time building monsters for theme parks in his early twenties) and *3 In Three* appeared within two years. Despite all three – and, indeed, many of his later titles – focusing on similarly fiendish puzzles, it's not the creation of these that pleases Johnson the most. "I equally enjoy every aspect of the production process," he admits. "What fascinates me most in life is mythology, that grand predilection of humans to organise the world into fantastic schemes of legends, heroes and artistry. My games spring from mythology whether it be Tarot cards, the Greek Gods or a world of numbers and letters inside a computer. The puzzles are my unique contribution to that gestalt."

And clearly, puzzles are what cause people to flock to Johnson's cause. His fans, or True Believers as he fondly refers to them, rabidly try their hand at anything he creates, from the annual April Fool's Day treasure hunts that appear on his website – www.fools-errand.com – to the *Masquerade*-style book Johnson created in conjunction with master illusionist David Blaine ("The prize was $100,000 and nobody wanted the book to be solved in the first week of publication – how do you create a puzzle evident enough to be noticed but obscure enough not to be noticed?" he muses).

Conversely, the thing he keeps foremost in his mind when devising his works are those who will ultimately try to solve them. "When it comes to creating puzzles, I favour having a wide variety of challenges, none too difficult in and of itself," Johnson insists. "I'm more interested in creating a winding path of puzzles with a sense of rhythm and flow rather than in creating high brick walls and Mount Everests. I want, whenever a player sits down to play, for that person to feel like they've accomplished something every 20 minutes or so. To my way of thinking, puzzles are another element of storytelling and every good book ought to give its reader a chance to bookmark the page and turn off the light with a satisfied grin."

Having gone from independent developer to a senior producer at Phillips during its CD-i period, then to a consultant for a variety of publishing companies (Interplay, Warner Bros. Online, Disney Online), Johnson is now back to doing what he does best: making puzzle games, or more specifically, making games about his Fool. "I'd always envisioned a trilogy – *The Fool's Errand*, *The Fool And His Money*, and *The Fool's Paradise* – but my timing was a bit off, that's all," he says.

Due for release at the end of November following various delays, *The Fool And His Money* can be pre-ordered from fools-errand.com, where newcomers to his titles can also download his original trio of titles for free. "I'm self-publishing this game," he confesses, "so I need to gather my audience again. One person wrote 'You're the only fool I'll gladly suffer', and I think that says everything; the general feeling is that the sequel is still worth waiting for, though many have remarked on the irony of pre-ordering a game called *The Fool And His Money*…"

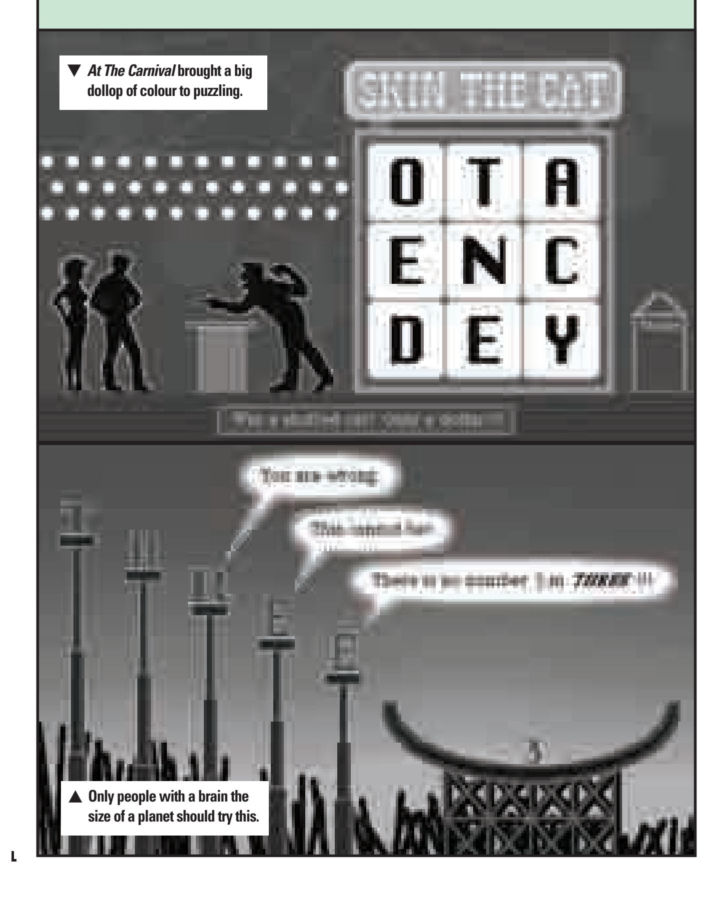
"I ENJOY EVERY ASPECT OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS, BUT I HAVE FAR MORE IDEAS THAN I'LL EVER HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE"

SOFTOGRAPHY

Although the list of titles Cliff Johnson has worked on isn't exactly lengthy, the games' reputation (particularly the earlier works) more than make up for their scarcity…

Programmer

The Fool's Errand (Macintosh) 1987
At The Carnival (Macintosh) 1989
3 In Three (Macintosh) 1991
Disney's Cartoon Arcade (Phillips CD-i) 1991
Hanna-Barbera's Cartoon Carnival (Phillips CD-i) 1993
Merlin's Apprentice (Phillips CD-i) 1994
Labyrinth Of Crete (Phillips CD-i) 1995
Disney's The Hunt For The Lost Toy (n/a) 1997
David Blaine's $100,000 Challenge (n/a) 2003
The Fool And His Money (PC/Macintosh) 2005



▼ *At The Carnival* brought a big dollop of colour to puzzling.

▲ Only people with a brain the size of a planet should try this.



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

SHORT 'N' SWEET

Dear games™

Do you know if the Capcom collections that have recently been released for the PSone in Japan will be appearing in the UK? I never got them when they first came out and wouldn't mind collecting them.

Ian Maloney

While Capcom has no plans to release its *Capcom Retro Game Collection* in the UK, it does have another retro collection in the pipeline for PS2 and Xbox owners. *The Capcom Classics Collection* is due for release in October and will include over 20 titles such as *Final Fight, Bionic Commando, 1942* and *Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* so that should keep you busy for a while.

DEAD AGAIN

Dear games™

Just a quick email in response to the gaming myth about reviving Aeris in *Final Fantasy VII* that was in issue 31. I found some info that is probably completely false but was hoping that you could maybe shed some light on it.



People, people – it's time to move on. Plenty more fish in the sea, etc.

Although it's obviously untrue that you can bring Aeris back to life in the game, I did read somewhere that you are able to see her ghost at the church in Midgar (although it's only for a split second). The reasoning behind this is that Square had originally intended for Aeris to be resurrected, but didn't have time to complete the section before the game's release.

Supposed evidence to support this theory is an old man who in the Midgar slums pipe… [goes on to explain a very long sequence of events]. Now, I'm sure this is probably all a load of rubbish, but I thought it was an interesting theory and might give some hope to the poor souls who refuse to let Aeris go.

Brian

We've lost count of the number of Aeris theories out there, but yours is one of the more interesting ones we've heard. Apparently it is possible to revive Aeris with a GameShark (although we've never tried it) but it makes no difference to the actual game. Some people just need to know when to let go…

THE KEY, THE SECRET

Dear games™

Many thanks for the small feature on *Solomon's Key* in issue 32, as it proved to be an interesting read. I'm going through a retro puzzle phase at the moment and didn't even know this game existed, so it was great to be able to read something about it. I'm now on the hunt for my own copy but have had little luck finding one at the moment. Will there be any chance that you will cover more retro puzzle titles in the future as it would be extremely handy knowing which ones to look out for.

Nick C

Don't worry – puzzle games are a firm favourite with everyone in the office, so you're bound to see more articles in the coming months (in fact, check out our Retrospective with Cliff Johnson in this issue to find out about some hardcore puzzle action). Oh, and if you have access to a Japanese PS2, *Solomon's Key* is part of the *Tecmo Collection*, so track it down.

MUSIC FOR THE MASSES

Dear games™

What's your favourite retro game music? Mine is *Street Fighter II* – especially Blanka and Guile's stages. Can you imagine having a Blanka ring tone on your phone? Imagine the weird looks you'd get from everybody whenever you received a call.

What I'm really interested in though is a CD that contains every piece of music from the *Street Fighter* series. Do you know if this is available and, if so, where I could buy it?

Nsabasi Etteh

We're not too sure if the CD you're after exists. A *Street Fighter III* soundtrack was given away



Have you found an *SFII* soundtrack? Share the wealth and let us know.











STAR LETTER

Dear games™
Don't you just hate those 'hardcore' retro gamers who won't play any modern games? They don't play new games because they apparently aren't as good as games from the good ole days. This really gets my goat as even their precious retro games and consoles were new once, so surely they weren't very good at some stage as well?



If you think about it our games will also be retro games when the next generation appears and everyone has discarded them in favour of playing on their new super-powerful consoles with photo-realistic graphics and 12.1 sound.

Still, I'm sure there'll be a bunch of gits saying 'oh, but the old games are still better', even though the games they're talking about are *Halo 2* and *Gran Turismo 4*. Confusing, eh?
Matthew Usherwood

It's a fair point, but we reckon there's only a minority of retro gamers who think like this. We guess it all comes down to the mantra, 'a good game will always remain a good game'. Sure, there are some classic games available on older machines, but anyone who decides to turn their backs on the likes of *Resident Evil 4* and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is missing out. Still you've certainly got us thinking, so pick a free retro game while we mull over your comments…

with the recent anniversary book, but we've not been able to track down a *Street Fighter II* CD. As for our top retro tunes, anything *Castlevania*-related tends to go down really well, though you can't beat Square's RPG scores for tugging at the heart strings.

OLD SCHOOL RULES

Dear games™
I just wanted to say that it was great to see the Classic Machine feature back, even if it did have a new name [issue 32]. Not only was the design brilliant, but I couldn't believe how much information you were able to cram into just four pages. Early Classic Machines have always been interesting to read, but were often lacking in content so this is a real turnaround.

Will you be carrying on this format for future issues and can we expect to see some of the older consoles from past issues covered in this new style? I'd be particularly interest to see an update on the Sinclair Spectrum, PC Engine and Sega Master System.
James Allen

Don't worry, we're well aware of how popular the original features were and fully intend to cover past systems that we've already written about. We've got another machine for you this month – the ZX81 – and there'll be plenty more in the future, including systems that we've never covered before.



Bored of 8-bit arguments? Change is a-comin'. Soon. Perhaps.

TRASH OF THE TITANS

Dear games™
Please, please, please change Clash Of The Titans. I really enjoy reading it but I think it's crazy that you don't cover more conversions in the article. I'd love to know how the Master System and Atari ST versions of a game compared and am sick and tired of reading about how great the Spectrum was (it wasn't, by the way). Instead of having a (low-quality) retro ad on the other page, why not have more conversions instead? Go on, you know it makes sense.
Michael White

If we changed the current format and included more titles we'd lose the schoolground scrapping elements of Clash that people enjoy, but this is the part of the Retro section that draws the most comments so we may look at making a few changes to the 8-bit brawling. Look out for other Retro changes too…





C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

BUYERS' GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE



BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60



ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-25Amstrad CPC 664 £20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-30

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore VIC-20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (depending on model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£70-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£50-100
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£80-180
Super Grafx	£200-300





NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£10-170 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-40
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-30
Mega Drive	£5-20
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right then, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classic games to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to buy. Hopefully, we can help. Every month we'll be printing the current range of prices for a selection of classic games for a particular system or from a popular series. Of course, prices are subject to change, so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less. This month we're taking a look at the most desirable *Castlevania* titles.

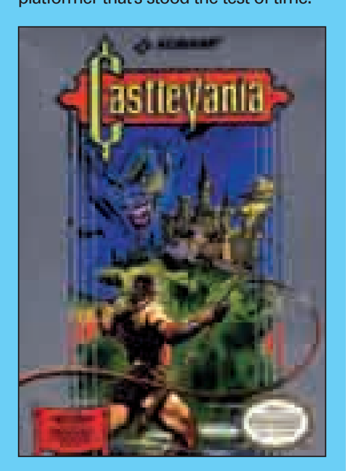


Castlevania

System: NES

Estimated Price: £5-15

If you're a hardcore *Castlevania* fan you'll want to hunt down the extremely rare *Vampire Killer* for the MSX; anyone else should be more than happy with the NES version. Sure, it has some stiff controls and the visuals are best described as 'garish', but if you can get past these shortcomings you'll find an enjoyable platformer that's stood the test of time.

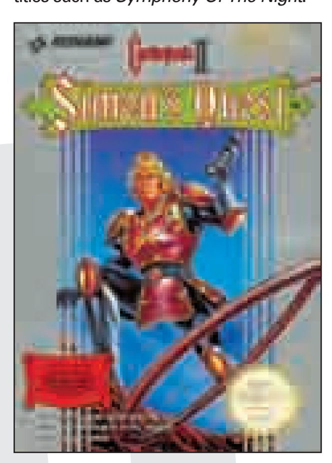


Castlevania II: Simon's Quest

System: NES

Estimated Price: £5-20

While *Simon's Quest* has aged quite badly, it's an important jewel in the *Castlevania* crown. Unlike the first game, *Simon's Quest* featured RPG elements and plays more like *Metroid*. It's crushingly dull nowadays, but it's easy to appreciate the foundations it laid for later titles such as *Symphony Of The Night*.

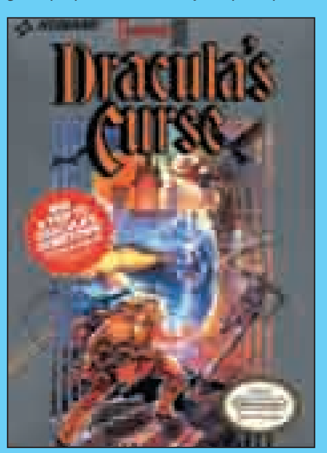


Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse

System: NES

Estimated Price: £20-35

Konami's third outing on the NES was its most ambitious. As well as overhauling the aesthetics Konami added multiple branch points, several new characters and a handy password system (it's still quite a tough game). A mint copy can usually cost a fair amount but the superb gameplay and additions justify the price.

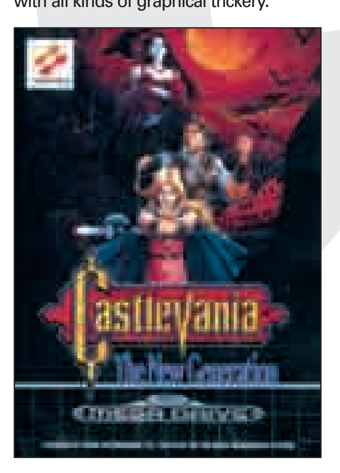


Castlevania: The New Generation

System: Mega Drive

Estimated Price: £10-25

It's been climbing in price recently, but *The New Generation* (or *Bloodlines* as it's known in the US) is worthy of your attention. Few thought Konami would be able to achieve the same magic on the Mega Drive that it had on the SNES, but the developer delivered a top platformer with all kinds of graphical trickery.



Castlevania Chronicles

System: PlayStation

Estimated Price: £5-15

Castlevania Chronicles is a remake of *Akumajou Dracula*, which was released on the Sharp X6800 in 1993. Konami decided to update the classic game in 2001 for the PlayStation and included new cut-scenes, a new main character, enhanced music and more balanced gameplay. Unlike *Symphony Of The Night* there aren't any plush extras, so you're better off with the US version.



Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood

System: PC Engine CD ROM

Estimated Price: £40-120

Dracula X is one of the most expensive *Castlevania* games around, but it's worth every penny. Featuring fantastic visuals, some gorgeous tunes and loads of secrets, *Dracula X*, along with *Symphony Of The Night*, remains one of the greatest games in the series. An utterly essential purchase, just make sure you're buying an original copy as we've come across quite a few copies recently.



Super Castlevania IV

System: SNES

Estimated Price: £10-20

Forget the horribly butchered *Vampire's Kiss* (which was a cut down version of the terrific *Dracula X*) – *Super Castlevania IV* is the only game in the franchise to seriously consider picking up if you're a Super Nintendo owner. While it lacks many of the elements that made *Castlevania III* such a pleasure to play, *Super Castlevania IV*'s superb orchestral soundtrack, excellent bosses and fantastic use of Mode 7 more than make up for any niggles you may have. A real must-have.



Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night

System: PlayStation

Estimated Price: £40-70

It's rare when a PAL version becomes more expensive than its NTSC counterpart, but *Symphony Of The Night* is a superb package for *Castlevania* fans. As well as getting a lavish art book, fans also received a second CD that featured music from various other games in the series. An extremely low print run and no Platinum re-release means that *Symphony Of The Night* often sells for around the £60 mark, so be prepared to splash some cash.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



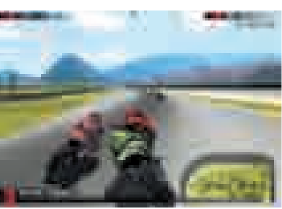
DEAD TO RIGHTS II

Oh, Namco – what have you done? Sure, the original *Dead To Rights* didn't rewrite the history books with its standard run-and-gun action, but at least it was fun. The sequel doesn't come close. Maybe you should have given up while you were ahead, eh?



MOTOGP 4

Still, we can at least take solace in the fact that Namco's come good on the racing front – *MotoGP 4* might not be perfect, but its focus on multiplayer and online play modes certainly makes up for it to a degree. Now Namco just has to get on with improving the rest…



DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

Five iterations in (six, if you include the sideline that was *Samurai Warriors*) and the *Dynasty Warriors* series is still delivering a solid if repetitive action adventure. If taking on hordes of enemies is your thing, you can't go wrong with this.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

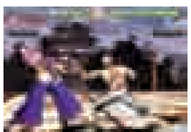
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	Hard as nails but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
God Of War	Sony	In-House	Sony's answer to *Devil May Cry* is a godly delight
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Gitaroo Man	THQ	Koei	The genuine thing of rhythm-action beauty
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House	Flawed genius, but genius nevertheless
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	The original still reigns for style and substance.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

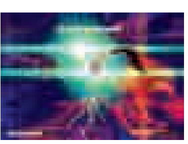
Amplitude
A recent resurgence in lunchtime play has seen Harmonix's title reclaim some of our lost love.



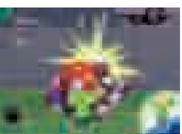
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution
Technical, skilful and visually pleasing – exactly how we like our beat-'em-ups. Bring on the next-gen version.



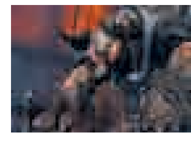
Rez
More Sega greatness, but of the variety that reminds us of why the Dreamcast really shouldn't have died when it did.



Katamari Damacy
Never mind if you don't have the ability to play the import version – the sequel will be here soon enough.



God Of War
We're keen to know who'd win out of Dante and Kratos in a fight, but there's plenty of room for both games on PS2.











XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

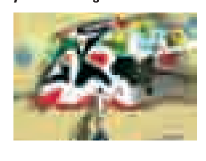
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the upcoming Xbox 360, Microsoft has pledged to support the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House	No *GT4* comparisons – just a solid Xbox racing game
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	And about time too – a better version in almost every way
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
RalliSport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House	The best Splinter Cell yet, thanks to the co-op mode
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	The greatest collection of fighting games ever? Hell yes
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	An infinitely expanding universe of online blasting action

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

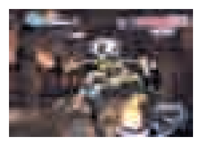
Jet Set Radio Future
■ **Over three years old and still one of the best games available on the Xbox. Shouldn't that tell you something?**



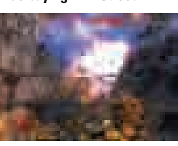
Out Run 2
■ **We're disappointed that the SP version isn't coming to Xbox, but that doesn't stop us loving the original game.**



Psi-Ops: TMC
■ **Hugely overlooked slice of action adventure from Midway, proving that physics really can make a game great.**



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
■ **Again, why this didn't do better is beyond us. We assume it's because everyone was buying *FIFA Street*.**



Def Jam: FFNY
■ **As brutal as it is shameless promotion for the hip-hop artists contained within, you can't beat a bit of *Def Jam*.**

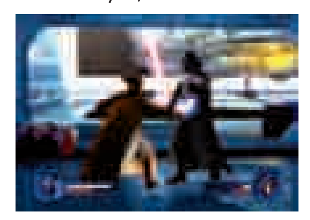






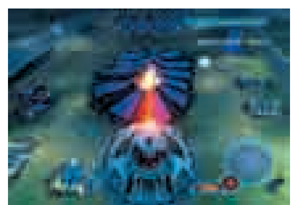
STAR WARS EPISODE III: REVENGE OF THE SITH

We don't even want to ask how this managed to stay at the top of the charts for so long – clearly, the wool-headed masses prefer a licence over, say, something even close to representing gameplay. Shame on you, Activision.



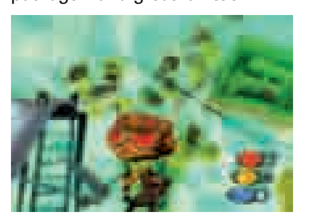
DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

It's true – you can take the *GTA* model and apply it to almost any stylistic genre. While *San Andreas* has the hip-hop thing down to a tee, we can't help but feel that bothering people with an anal probe and making their brains explode is ten times funnier.



PSYCHONAUTS

Goodness knows when Tim Schafer's latest work will arrive here (some places say it's out now, others predict the end of the year) but either way, you need it in your life. It's funny, charming, freaky and weird all in one package – and great fun too.



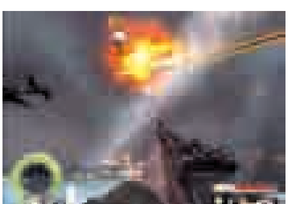
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT

Maybe saying the sins of *Rising Sun* were laid to rest was a little strong (after all, they were rather large sins) but even so, *European Assault* is the best *Medal Of Honor* game for a while. Not that that's a hard task, of course.



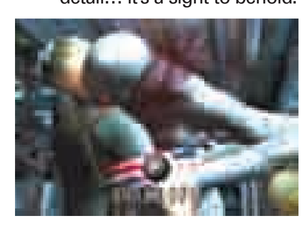
LEGEND OF ZELDA: MASTER QUEST

And to think we always thought ourselves to be *Zelda* completists – and then we realised we'd never finished *Master Quest*. As it stands, we're heading for Death Mountain – just don't mention the Water Temple yet, okay?



RESIDENT EVIL 4

It's back. Again. But when a member of the **games™** team gets himself a massive plasma-screen TV the size of a bus, you've got to see this once more. All that gory action in high-definition progressive scan detail… it's a sight to behold.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

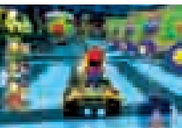
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
WarioWare: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	Far better than its clueless detractors will have you believe

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

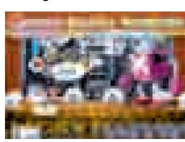
Alien Hominid
■ Small, yellow, cute… and full of alien rage. Think *Metal Slug* on extra-terrestrial steroids and you've scored.



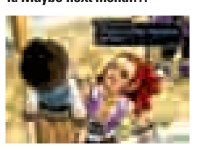
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!
■ It divided opinion over its quality, but it's worth getting hold of considering it's the best the Cube has.



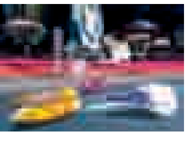
Paper Mario: TYD
■ So many RPGs on the GameCube, so little time – but at least Mario's offering keeps us coming back over and over.



Tales Of Symphonia
■ Don't hate us – we've played *Tales* for hours on end and we're still not done with it. Maybe next month…



F-Zero GX
■ Still the fastest racing game on the circuit today. Best played with plenty of beer and a few friends.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

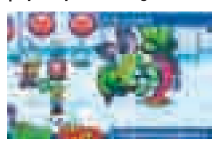
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

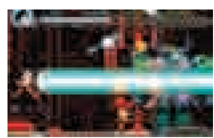
Metroid: Zero Mission
■ ***Fusion*** **was enjoyable, but the GBA reinvention of the original** ***Metroid*** **is easily the greatest portable Samus adventure ever.**



Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga
■ **We're happy that the sequel to Alphadream's hit action RPG is coming to the DS. If you haven't played it, you're missing out.**



Astro Boy: Omega Factor
■ **Platforming action doesn't come much more frantic than this (unless, perhaps, you're a fan of** ***Mega Man***). **Incredibly playable.**



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

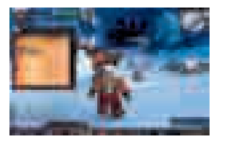
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	EA	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Joint Ops – Typoon Rising
■ **Novalogic's jungle-based FPS is great for online play, but with** ***Battlefield 2*** **now roaming freely will it be able to stay alive?**



World Of Warcraft
■ **Blizzard seems ready to start expanding its already epic world, so now would be the perfect time to start adventuring.**



Guild Wars
■ **If, on the other hand, you like your RPGs slightly more pick-up-and-play (and free), then NCSoft's offering might be the one for you.**



PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

MX518 OPTICAL MOUSE

Console: PC
From: Logitech
Price: £29.99
Available: Now

We know what you're thinking – a mouse is a mouse is a mouse, right? Well, not quite. Certainly, most mice today are much of a muchness in terms of features and functionality; however, Logitech's MX518 Optical Mouse, being designed specifically for gaming use as it is, offers several advantages over regular mice. Primarily, this is down to the number of buttons it has – eight in total, allowing for more actions to be mapped onto it for ease of access. However, the biggest enhancement has to be not only through the mouse's use of 16-bit software as opposed to 8-bit (doubling the signal speed) but also through its ability to increase and decrease the mouse resolution at the press of a button. This effectively increases either mouse precision or speed, depending on whether you go up or down, giving gamers the edge according to the situation. Who'd have thought something so minor would make such a big difference?

F USB CONTROLLER

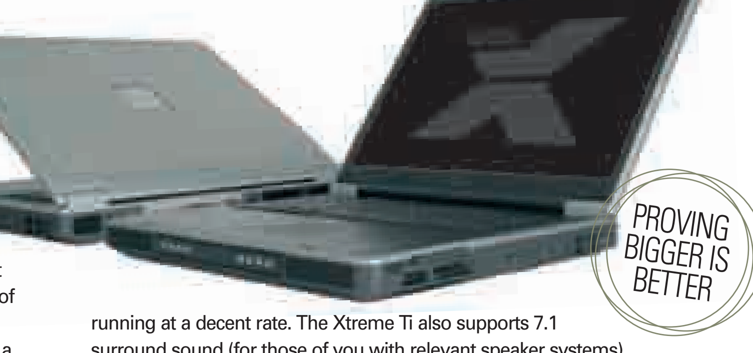


Console: PC
From: Joytech
Price: £14.99
Available: Now

Fed up of outdated, ungainly and poorly designed PC controllers? Thank goodness for Joytech taking its first steps into the world of computers, then. Using an identical design to its Xbox Neo-S pad, Joytech's Neo-S USB pad is a ten-button pad (six face buttons, two triggers and 'pressable' analogue thumb sticks) with a rugged design… but that's only the start. The real benefits come from the pad's Config Pro software that comes with Joytech's own 'Mouse Mimik' technology; designed to enable the pad to work with virtually any PC game, the pad can be completely customised to function exactly as you like. Once you've got it set up for a game, you can save your configuration for later use or share it online with friends. Joytech also plans to release customised configuration files for specific games in the coming months. Considering the pad's functionality, the ridiculously low price makes it a definite must for PC gamers – even if you prefer a keyboard and mouse.

XTREME TI 3.6GHZ

Console: N/A
From: Rock
Price: £1996.33
Available: Now



A missing capital 'e' aside, Xtreme would be more than a fitting word to describe Rock's latest gaming-focused laptop, for a number of reasons. The first and most obvious would be the fact that this is an absolute beast just in terms of dimensions. Compared to most machines on the market that aim to be as compact as possible, Rock's offering defies the meaning of the word 'laptop', taking things in completely the opposite direction – unless you've got the lap of a bodybuilder, you'll want to keep this on a more solid surface. But there is a method behind the madness… to a degree, at least.

Promoting itself purely as a gaming machine first and everything else second, the Xtreme Ti is all about raw power – something that might explain the four meaty fans set into its base and an over-indulgence of external ports decorating the sides. At its heart, the machine holds a whopping (well, whopping for a laptop) Pentium 4 3.6GHz processor and a whole gigabyte of RAM, as well as the latest PCI Xpress ATI Mobility Radeon graphics card – more than enough to keep most modern games running at a decent rate. The Xtreme Ti also supports 7.1 surround sound (for those of you with relevant speaker systems) and uses its own built-in SRS WOW sound technology (the same kind used in many of Joytech's quality portable monitors) to provide punchy effects alongside the visual action.

Of course, there's also all the other usual features that you'd associate with a top-of-the-line laptop: wireless functionality, an eight-speed DVD writer and option for a second similar drive, a 100Gb hard drive, and even a built-in video camera above the screen so you can use teleconferencing. Undoubtedly, the Xtreme Ti is an impressive piece of kit, so long as you've got the muscle for it – both in your arms and in your wallet.

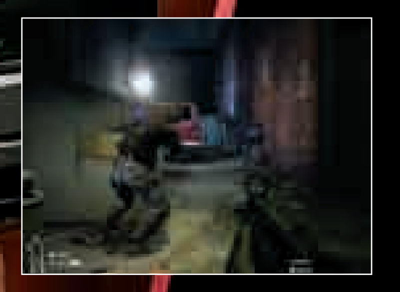
PLAY TO WIN

COME JOIN THE GAMES™ ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY – WE'VE LAID ON EVERYTHING YOU'LL NEED TO ENJOY SOME OF THE VERY BEST PC MULTIPLAYER TITLES AROUND

Online gaming isn't just confined to the PC, obviously, but some of the best players around can be found enjoying it there – which is why we introduced the **games™** PC gaming servers, thanks to our friends at Jolt Online Gaming. We'll be rotating the games again in a month or two (no doubt *Battlefield 2* is already getting you ready for some online duelling) but for now, just log on and enjoy some of the finest online multiplayer action around. Come on, you know you want to.

SWAT 4

Making a new entry onto **gamesTM01** is Vivendi's cop-busting FPS, *SWAT 4*. We've set up some games of Barricaded Suspects (that's Team Deathmatch, to those who don't know), although Co-op mode will also be making an appearance.



COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

Still reigning supreme on the popularity list, it's *Counter-Strike Source* on **gamesTM02**, and to be honest, we can't blame you. Particularly since Valve introduced the new levels.

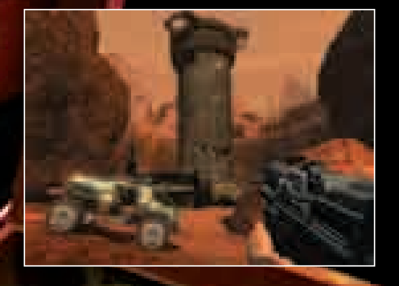
PAINKILLER

The same old game as before on **gamesTM03**? Well, not quite. Yes, we've kept *Painkiller* but we've also installed the new PK++ mod to keep things interesting. The pain level is still just as high as it ever was though…



PARIAH

Maybe it's because *Pariah*'s multiplayer is so similar in feel to *Unreal Tournament*, but we just felt compelled to give it a whirl. Head for **gamesTM04** and you'll find all the multiplayer modes you could ever wish to try.



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

No change here, simply because you seem to be loving it so much. Advance And Secure remains the game on **gamesTM05**, so get out there and crack some skulls in the jungle, soldier.



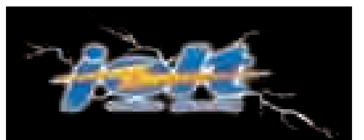
Getting onto the **games™** servers couldn't be easier – simply call up the available server list within any of the above games, find the relevant **games™** gaming server and, providing the server isn't already full, click to enter. Our servers are still available to all with no restrictions and are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you have any problems or experience difficulty logging into the servers, just drop us a line at gamestm@paragon.co.uk, making sure that the words '**games™** servers' are displayed clearly in the subject heading of your email.

JOLT ONLINE

The official **games™** servers are provided by Jolt Online Gaming, the number-one gaming server provider in Europe. Jolt's servers have been seen by many as the benchmark in online gaming performance in Europe since 1999.

Jolt believes that online gaming is about more than just logging on to a random game server and playing with strangers. By fostering a strong relationship with its community and giving gamers places to hang out, Jolt has become host to one of the largest and most vibrant gaming communities in the world – you can join today by visiting http://forums.jolt.co.uk

Jolt also offers a variety of personalised game server packages catering for everyone from small clans looking for a private practice ground to large clans and organisations who want the prestige of their own branded and totally dedicated server boxes running multiple public game sessions with integrated admin tools, anti-



cheat software and access to a dedicated support team. With prices starting at £12 a month, Jolt's servers are affordable to all. For more information visit www.jolt.co.uk

NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™

Everyone's favourite dapper assassin is back for another round of silent slaughter. But will he come to a sticky end? games™ visits Denmark to investigate…

180 PAGES OF BARCODE BATTLING

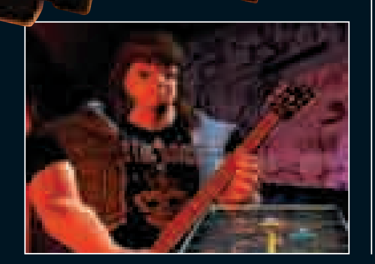
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

NEXT MONTH IN games™

We're technically in the middle of the annual summer gaming drought, but we can't see any sign of the joypad-rattling coming to a halt any time soon…

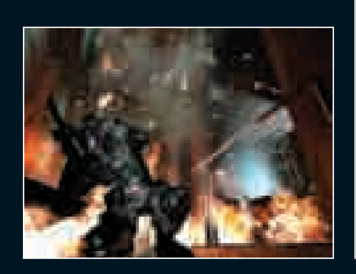
MORE…PREVIEWS

So what is it now… about six months until Christmas? Time to start putting together that list of games you want, then – and we've got just the kind of coverage to help you make your mind up. From *Shadow Of The Colossus, Genji* and *Perfect Dark Zero* to *F.E.A.R., Guitar Hero* and *Spore* (plus plenty more besides), you'll be spoilt for choice.



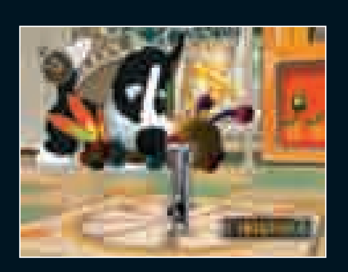
MORE…REVIEWS

Import coverage ahoy – Japan is bursting at the seams with games waiting to be looked at. *Chibi Robo*? *FamicomWars DS*? *Coded Arms*? Ooh, yes please. That's not to say we'll be bereft of Western coverage; games like *Total Overdose, Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* and *Codename Panzers: Phase Two* will also be getting the once over.



MORE…FEATURES

Well, where do we begin? Perhaps with a trip to Copenhagen to visit Io Interactive and discuss its rise to greatness. Or maybe a chat with one of the driving forces at Harmonix about the magic of rhythm action. And maybe (just maybe) we'll find out exactly who the big players are in the next generation of development. But only if you're good.



ON SALE 11 AUG 05

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Enough of what we think – this is where you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

WANDERING AROUND BRISTOL some weeks ago I came across *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* being sold off cheaply. I was more than a little surprised that it was priced at £14.99 – given that it had been out under a month – but I was told that this was because it just wasn't selling.

After having completed the game, I feel compelled to write just to state what a tragedy it is that a fantastic game like this should fail to be embraced by the majority of the gaming public. *Stranger's Wrath* is the best FPS to grace the Xbox since the original *Halo* and is far superior to many of recent releases. While *Doom 3* may have the superior graphics, or *Pariah* better game physics, *Stranger's Wrath* performs well in these areas but also has originality, humour and a kick-ass story on its side. Ultimately, where it transcends other FPSs is that it offers much more than simply shooting everything in sight.

Why, then, has this masterpiece not sold? Is it a case of bad taste among the gaming public, or does EA, as publisher, carry some of the blame, given that it mass advertised that heap of junk *Rogue Agent* and yet allowed *Stranger's Wrath* to slip under the radar of many gamers?
Steve Smith

gamesTM: The short answer is that we'll never know why *Stranger's Wrath* failed to sell. It certainly deserved more attention than it got, but it seems that a combination of EA failing to push it and a slew of high-profile releases conspired to relegate such a great game to the bargain bin. However, Oddworld Inhabitants' misfortune is your gain – £14.99 for one of the games of the year is a bit of a bargain.

WITH NEXT-GENERATION consoles around the corner, I have already begun to feel a sense of loss for the soon-to-be-forgotten current generation. It's been an exciting five years and has left me with mixed feelings as I look at all three consoles. As the current generation swept in, I rushed to get a GameCube while laughing at the ugly Xbox and over-rated PlayStation2. But time passed, the GameCube marketing wasn't working (*Luigi's Mansion* vs *Halo* – what was Nintendo thinking?), and I remember feeling envious that no games seemed to stand out compared to those on the other consoles.

So over the next year I acquired an Xbox and PS2 and my Cube seemed destined to relegation… until recently. When looking at the Xbox 360 with its HD-TV capabilities and teraflop of power, Revolution with its obscure originality, and PS3 with its multimedia capabilities, I realised that I don't have a TV capable of HD-TV, I already have enough DVD players, and I already have wireless email and video conferencing on my PC, but what I want and have always wanted is a great games console with quality games.

And so with the arrival of *RE4* I've made up with my Cube and dusted off *Super Mario Sunshine, Eternal Darkness, Metroid Prime, Zelda* and *Viewtiful Joe* to play again. The other consoles have some great games – Xbox Live is a winner and the variety on the PS2 is unmatched – but with hindsight the Cube won this generation's war for me with its accomplished and original games.

What I hope can be avoided in the next generation is a host of third-party clones – some may turn out to be winners but it seems a shame that there have been far too many poor or very

"THE CAPABILITIES OF THE NEXT-GEN CONSOLES ARE THERE SO I URGE DEVELOPERS AND PROGRAMMERS TO USE THEM, TO BE ORIGINAL AND TO GIVE US SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO"



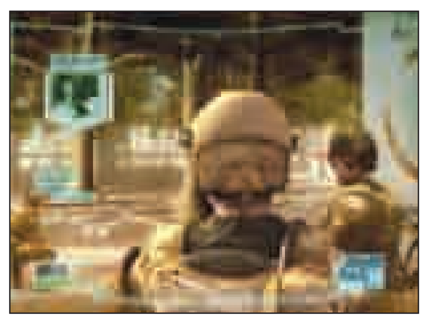
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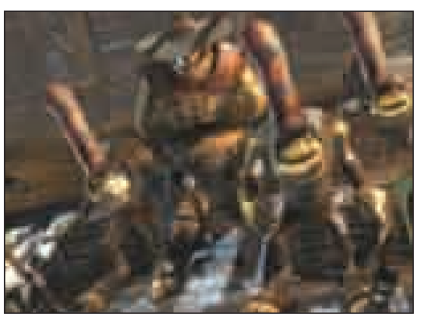
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If the games on the Xbox 360 and other next-gen consoles turn out to be as good as they look, do we have much to worry about?



It's a crying shame *Stranger's Wrath* didn't sell more, but it's not like we didn't tell you to go and buy a copy, eh?

average games. The capabilities of the next-gen consoles are there so I urge developers to use them, to be original and to give us something to look forward to. Don't take advantage of us with poor film tie-ins or rushed sequels.

I hope gamers can make the next-gen battle a fair fight and stand up for quality gaming on whichever console it may come. I will gladly pay up to £60 for a quality title but I will not pay for mediocre crap or to be fooled by marketing.

Michael Wright

games™: Cheer up, you miserable bugger – it's not as grim as you think. Certainly there's been a glut of games in this generation that have been derivative in the extreme, but many haven't. This has been the case for every generation of console, so it's unlikely to change. However, the suggestion that the next-gen consoles will be home solely to a slew of me-too titles and poorly executed licences is a bit short-sighted. Dwelling on the negative aspects of gaming is all too easy but we prefer to remain positive – if you're not even remotely excited by what the future of videogames will offer, perhaps it's time you chose another pastime to while away the hours.

ON THE EVE of the next generation of consoles, the term 'must-have' carries more weight than ever. National spending is high, and there's an increasing fanaticism about appearance within the Western world. Unlike the recession-hit Eighties and early Nineties where, some might argue, the true potential of gaming made itself known, people are more willing to plunge deeper into debt just to own the latest gadgets, cars and accessories. "It makes you feel good about yourself™".

Another reason for people liking the new is the increasing amount of technology in their home. It makes them think they're technologically savvy, giving rise to the much-parodied '1337' generation. By the time new consoles have been released they're old news, while simultaneously being the object of immediate gluttony by people fattened by pre-release leaks and alpha screenshots.

So we need to discuss what these new consoles are. Are they a new series of platforms on which to further gaming capabilities? I would argue no. They are a badge to be bought at a high price and are something that says in cold brushed metal 'I'm better than you'. The reason why the games enthusiasts are decrying these new platforms is because we've seen this gaping hole in the product; it's not about the games any more. The 'installed user base' be damned – all that's relevant now is the appearance of looking after loyal customers.

As an afterthought, in discussing the DS and Revolution, Miyamoto has said that the games consoles and their controls look daunting to a non-gamer, hence the new direction of Nintendo. I am finding this somewhat ironic, as from what I



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Text Life

Why is the date of the next issue no longer printed at the back page of the mag?
g™: Because it's also printed on the Next Month page.

Is it true that the PS3 is the most powerful of the next gen consoles?
g™: Sony might want you to believe that, but despite the impressive tech demo we're not saying anything until we've seen the games in action. Don't be swayed by the spin.

I hope the x360 kicks sonys teeth in wot with there lying about killzone2 its prerendered so admit it +things would be dull if sony dominate the nxt 5years c'mon x360
g™: Sorry – you must have us confused with someone else. This is a multiformat magazine…

Still no review of Rainbow Six 4?What r Ubisoft up 2. Please promise u will b reviewing it when it finally shows up?
g™: It's on its way, really it is. And as soon as we've got review code we'll be all over it like a rash, really we will.

Can u confirm yes, is the XBOX 360 backwards compatible?
g™: According to Microsoft, the 360 is backwards compatible. Whether this applies to all Xbox games, however, remains to be seen.

Touching + Yoshi = DS beauty!
g™: To varying degrees…

Xbox PES4 the best?You're having a giraffe. Its like playing with a footrest.
g™: There is nothing of the footrest in the Xbox version of *PES4*.

It would be cool if u guys and gals would do a gamers quiz. just a bit of fun or prizes.do u have any jobs going?
g™: We have run a few quizzes in the past, with varying degrees of success. We'll, you know, think about it. As for jobs, we generally prefer people who don't write like Prince song titles.



Awesome graphics are nothing without gameplay innovation, as *Viewtiful Joe* has proved. Will developers remember this?



Just so you know, we never get 'pushed' by PR people to increase our scores. Well, we get pushed, but we don't fall over.

can see, the non-gamers are the demographic that should be least worried. At least they won't be bitterly disappointed with the next-gen consoles, and at least they can plug their iPods into them and download their new tunes.

What are the gamers left with?
Peter Williams

games™: Did we miss something? Where has all this paranoia regarding the future of gaming come from? The hardware has only just been unveiled and little is really known about the games that we'll be experiencing over the course of the next five years. As such, speculation and negativity are largely pointless.

AS THE NEW wave of next-gen gaming is about to arrive, I can't help but reflect on what the last/current generation has shown us.

Take the advent of online console gaming – yeah, the Dreamcast (RIP) did it first, but Xbox Live has done it properly and we've seen Microsoft, of all people, lead the way. Suddenly gamers are making friends all over the world and killing them for fun.

Sony hasn't been outdone in the innovation stakes either. Sony has given us EyeToy, *SingStar* and popularised the dance mat. Who would have thought that people would be buying consoles to get an aerobics workout?

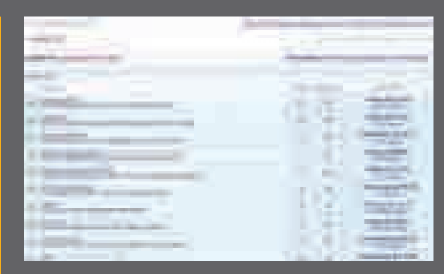
Why is this important? New ways are being found to play games – DS stylus, anyone? In the last generation the stereotype of the lonely geek indulging in an unhealthy and unsociable pursuit has started to deteriorate. Now you can make friends and exercise while gaming.

I can only hope this continues into the next generation and we don't get bogged down in more polygons, more enemies on screen, more realistic facial features and so on. There is true innovation in gaming that's introducing the pastime to a new audience, not just in the games themselves, but what we think of as games and how we play them. I hope we'll still see this in the next generation.
Jim Gallagher

games™: Thank God – someone's being a bit more positive. It's true that the current generation has seen perhaps the greatest amount of innovations that have changed people's views of gaming and opened it up to a wider audience, and there's no reason why this shouldn't continue. Nintendo is famously promising new control methods, Xbox Live can only go from strength to strength, and who knows what sort of peripherals we'll see in a few years…

LET'S START ON a positive note. I first bought your magazine at issue 25 as I had just bought a Xbox, and since I already had a GameCube and PlayStation2 I needed a great, mature, multiformat magazine that compared the games across formats in their reviews. A friend





FROM THE FORUM

WE LOVE GAMES, BUT THEY HAVE BAD HABITS…

Papa
I hate pointless 'Press start' screens when a game loads. Why?! Does anyone else have game conventions that irritate them?

Delboy
Menu trees that are so idiot-proof that you can only get out of them by pressing back, back, back, back… etc. And that perennial favourite – the unskippable cut-scene.

toythatkills
I hate unpausable cut-scenes. If they're gonna last half an hour, let me pause them when I need to piss. Oh, and I hate cut-scenes that end with one button press – 20 minutes into a cut-scene, you drop the controller and – bam! – end of cut-scene. Sods. Now I have to watch the entire thing again.

Searly
For me it's endless loading times. I'd rather have terrible graphics than have to wait five minutes to load a room. There are so many games that have little or no loading, it's inexcusable for any game to have unreasonable times now. I'd also like to mention terrible voice acting, especially for games full of high drama. I really hate *Onimusha 3* for promising Jean Reno and delivering a shoddy American half-wit. There are decent voice-overs so why are they the exception rather than the rule?

DADDYCOOL
Kids who jump into car racing cabinets in arcades and pretend to drive just as you're about to feed the machine a credit! Honestly, you can be stood coin in hand while little Billy turns the wheel from left to right, gobbing everywhere as he makes the 'brum brum' sound.

Shufty
Cheap game bosses, the ones that require no real skill to beat, just luck or repeating the same move over and over. *MK: Deception* is a good example.

RivaOni
Tutorials that explain everything more than once: "To jump press the X button. As you approach the ledge, press the X button to jump."

Genji-Gloves
Mine have to be: boss characters in fighting games that are unplayable no matter how hard you try to find them; super cheap bosses; stupid checkpoints in games that send you back to the beginning.

Bahamut
Stupidly hidden things in games that are only obtainable with an FAQ or strategy guide are up there with the things I hate. It's becoming increasingly common (the *Final Fantasy* series springs to mind), and spoils things for me because *gasp* I like to find things on my own initiative.

told me you did this and don't over-rate games, so I bought **games™** and was so impressed that I subscribed and hunted down all the original 24 issues off eBay.

However, I'm starting to see a drop in quality. First, with the multiformat releases you no longer seem to compare the consoles. Now, I understand the Xbox version will probably have much better graphics (but that's not always the case, as *MGS2* proved) but that pad is awful for some games, which is why I depend on you to tell me if it's up to the job.

Then there's a freebie with the mag. I've always respected the way you never feel the need to give away free stuff to sell the mag and you don't have cheats and guides taking up space better used for other things. Yet with issue 33 I get what is basically a helpbook for *Forza*. Sure, you can argue it's not a guide it's more a making of/promotional booklet for the game, but why couldn't you have done this with a more essential game like *Stranger's Wrath* which needed more publicity? *Forza*, which will sell regardless of its quality, gets more publicity. So please, unless you do these booklets for more deserving or original games, don't do it again.

And what about that review in this same issue? Game in question: *Boiling Point* for the PC. You say it's essential, giving it 9/10, which normally makes me go out and buy it. However, the other mag I collect (*Edge*) says it's broken and only gave it 2/10. Yours and *Edge*'s reviews are usually very similar, but *Edge* says *Boiling Point* has a sticky frame rate no matter how powerful your PC or how low the settings are, but you don't mention this. I know there can be different opinions regarding games but this is a huge difference and I don't know what to do. Have you started over-rating games or been pushed by a PR to give it a high score?

Lastly, your classic machine in the Retro section – it's the SNES. I know how great this console is but you've already featured it once. What the hell is going on? Couldn't this space be used for covering more retro games instead of what I've already read about? Please sort yourselves out – don't let all these *MCV* awards go to your head.

Nick Foulstone

games™: Well, that's told us… We haven't dropped our version comparisons, we're just being honest. If we have all the versions of a multiformat title we'll cover them; sometimes we don't, so rather than make something up we don't include them. We'd love to produce supplements for all the key games. In this case, the *Forza* booklet was paid for by Microsoft to promote its game. Paid-for supplements are common with all kinds of magazines, and as the *Forza* booklet appeared after we'd reviewed the game, it hardly swayed our opinion.

It seems *Edge* found *Boiling Point* unplayable, but the version we reviewed didn't have the same problems. Perhaps we have a higher-spec PC, but it might just be a case of two people having two different opinions. As for covering the SNES again, we'd always planned to return to certain machines as the articles that have previously appeared weren't particularly in depth. We hope that clears things up for you and that these issues haven't spoiled your summer…

"**GAMEPLAY** HAS HARDLY UNDERGONE THE **SAME REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES** THAT 32-, 64- AND 128-BIT GRAPHICS HAVE. **A MINORITY OF GAMERS HAVE RECOGNISED** THIS, AND PREFER GAMES THAT SHOW **SOME ORIGINAL THINKING** OUTSIDE THE GENRE STEREOTYPES"

“It was rather an unusual shop,
because it didn't sell anything.”

